University of Alberta

A Case Study of the French and English Literacy Experiences of a Gifted Girl In an Elementary French Immersion Classroom

by

Angela Gauthier ©

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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

This case study followed Molly's French and English reading progress from grade one through grade four in the context of an elementary French Immersion school setting. I was interested in how this little girl, identified as gifted in kindergarten, differed from other children in her class in what she read, how she read, and what she did with what she read in French and English.

My review of the research literature provides an overview of programs for the gifted, for gifted underachievers, the most salient characteristics of gifted girls, as well as the characteristics of gifted children who are strong readers. Relevant reading theories and reading in a second language were also briefly examined. Data collection consisted of in-class observations, interviews, and the administration of reading inventories, tests and surveys, as well as a collection of work samples in both languages, gathered at various times of the year. During the data gathering process for both the prestudy and the main study, Molly's special emotional and educational needs as a gifted girl, her concomitant problems in school, and any special accommodations in program planning that were implemented for her were noted.

At the end of this four-year study, Molly's social and emotional life, especially at school, took precedence over her love of reading and her curiosity about animals and related scientific facts. Evidence indicated that Molly began to succumb to social and peer pressures that would see her lose self-confidence

and downplay her giftedness, as she tried to please those around her and fit into the social fabric of the school culture. A number of factors were seen to be contributors to the downward slide Molly began to experience as early as grade two: a lack of education concerning gifted students and their needs; a lack of resources for the gifted; a different definition of success in relation to gifted girls; larger class sizes, a burgeoning curriculum, and a world view that attempts to promote equality for all.

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CHAPTER ONE

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?
Mary Oliver, *The Summer Day*

Introduction

Reading and Me

I do not remember ever having problems reading. As far back as I can remember I enjoyed the activity and read voraciously. For many of my junior and senior high years, my idea of a wonderful weekend was one spent with books — reading two or three a weekend. Not being a part of the in crowd gave me ample time to engage in this activity. I do recall feeling sympathetic towards those students who had visible difficulty in this area because I felt they were missing so much. It was also evident to me that school was much more difficult if a person did not enjoy reading or had difficulty with it — I had not linked the two yet and wondered about my friends who professed to hate reading. While taking my first university degree, I began to understand the significance and complexity of being able to read. Some of my colleagues struggled to keep up with the number of readings and with the comprehension of these readings. I did not spend any time musing over these issues however, until I had children of my own.

Nightly bedtime stories were part of my children s routine from the time they were very small until late into their elementary school years. My daughter, like me, loved to read and had an impressive collection of books by the time she started school. She also began reading at an early age and had no trouble in that area. My son, however, did not see the activity, nor respond to reading the same way as my daughter had. Although he liked to be read to (only until 4th grade) and had good recall, I realized that he had problems with reading while helping him with his homework in grade three. My understanding of the complexity and importance of reading grew as I watched many beginning readers toil with schoolwork and struggle with reading, throughout their elementary years. There was not only a marked discrepancy in attitude and performance between readers and struggling readers but there was also a difference in attitude and performance between those who learned to read and those who loved to read. I noticed this in my son who eventually learned to read but never loved to read. As my teaching career moved forward so did my curiosity in and knowledge about the area of reading. Each time I learned a new way to help a struggling reader, another would present me with a new problem to try and overcome. I continued focusing in this area during most of my teaching career because I believed it to be of utmost importance — especially for students in grade one, where I spent 12 years teaching. I wanted to instill a love of reading in my students. I wanted them to have confidence in themselves as learners and I knew reading would have a major impact on the realization of this aspect of their schooling. Reading would touch every aspect of their lives and it seemed to me that life would be easier and more fulfilling in many ways if a person did not struggle in this area. Admittedly, during language arts periods, I did not spend a lot of time with those students who showed a facility with reading, other than to provide them with a rich literary environment in which to advance and explore their potential. I did not think they needed as much help as those who struggled. And then came Molly.

Background to the Problem

September 3, 2001 was the first day of another school year. As at the beginning of every school year there was much hustle and bustle as parents brought their children to their designated classrooms. Feelings of excitement and apprehension permeated the atmosphere, evident in everyone s expressions and actions. Parents lingered, making sure their children were safe and comfortable. Although it was my twelfth year of teaching in an elementary French immersion school, I too felt some anxiety and excitement. I felt excitement because each new year presented opportunities to gain new insights and experiences about student learning and about teaching practices. One of the reasons for my anxiety was the upcoming major challenge that every grade one teacher faces every year - teaching children how to read. Each year I encountered at least one child who had difficulty. Because I believed that learning to read was crucial to becoming a successful student and a life-long learner, I devoted much of my teaching career to understanding how students learned to read and to acquiring strategies to help those who were struggling. My goal was to find as many strategies as I could to deal with the many learning styles and unique problems of struggling readers I would find in my classroom. To this end, I attended workshops like Jim Stone s Animated Literacy, Nancy Bell s Visualizing and Verbalizing, Balanced Literacy, Visual Phonics, Differentiating Classroom Instruction, and Rick Freeze s Precision Reading program among others. I took courses in Early Reading Intervention, in diagnosing and correcting reading and writing problems, and in developing literacy through drama. I also tutored children who struggled with reading, several evenings a week, for four years. However, all this experience in remedial reading did not prepare me for the challenge presented to me on the morning of September 3, 2001.

On this morning, I looked at the new group of students who would be in my care and wondered what kind of obstacles I would have to overcome to meet everyone s expectations that these children learn to read by the end of the year. One mother had proudly come to tell me that her child was gifted — that she had been identified at the end of her kindergarten year - and that she loved reading science books. I have had numerous bright children in my class over the years but never one who had been identified as gifted. When I first began teaching, gifted students were rarely talked about nor identified in the early grades. In the last few years, however, the kindergarten teacher at this school began making a concerted effort to formally identify these children when they showed academic promise, in an effort to obtain funding and special programming for them. Molly was one of the children she had identified and as I perused her file, I found that Molly had been referred for a cognitive assessment in March of her kindergarten year. The school district s chartered psychologist administered the *Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence — Revised (WPPSI-R)* (Wechsler, 2002) where Molly scored in the superior range on the three scales (performance, verbal and full) with little variance between and among the scores.

The test indicated Molly had a high ability in spatial relations, an excellent expressive vocabulary, and good reasoning and math skills. The school counselor administered the *Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test,* specifically the sections on letter-word identification and passage comprehension, and Molly scored in the superior range on both. I quickly realized that my toolbox filled with remedial reading strategies was not going to benefit this child. I also realized that I needed more than just the extension activities I had used with bright students in earlier years.

As Molly and I worked together in the fall of 2001, it became apparent that she loved reading science books - especially those concerning sharks and dolphins - and loved sharing what she knew. Often during the twenty-minute afternoon reading time, I would find several students gathered around her as she read aloud a science book she found particularly interesting. On one occasion she read aloud to the class a booklet she had made on the planets. After the reading, she asked if there were any questions and confidently answered a number of them. Although the booklet did not contain a lot of written information, the planets were in order, the drawings reflected their size, color, and special features, including the recently discovered moon around Pluto. She was able to talk about some of the interesting features of these planets with relative ease, using appropriate vocabulary. Molly repeated this kind of sharing activity several times throughout the year on different scientific interests. I was fascinated by her verbal and reading abilities and, because of my experiences with her, became fascinated with the whole phenomenon of giftedness.

Over the course of that year, I studied the literature on gifted girls and reading in order to better understand the phenomenon of giftedness and to meet Molly s needs (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990; Friedman & Shore, 2000; Gallagher, 1985; Goodman, 1997; Kerr, 1994; Klein & Tannenbaum, 1992; Millard, 1997; Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990; Porter, 1999; Silverman, 1986; Smutny, 1998). The reading journey I embarked upon proved to be informative and stimulating. It heightened my fascination with the area of giftedness, revealed its complexity and served to foster more questions and concerns. One concern repeatedly expressed in the literature was that not enough was known about gifted girls in elementary schools (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Ellis & Willinsky, 1990; Friedman & Shore, 2000; Goldsmith, 2000; Kerr, 1994). I tended to agree, as I struggled to find information that would provide me with an in-depth understanding of the specific context in which I worked with Molly, that is, of the French and English reading experiences of gifted girls in French immersion classrooms.

The year passed quickly with my time being devoted not only to helping the emergent readers but also to working with Molly, who was reading at a grade four level in English and who was ahead of the other children in her French reading and speaking capabilities. I used words such as open, inquisitive, motivated, expressive, and confident to describe how I saw her. She engaged in discussions of topics such as pollution, history, and family relationships. Molly was not embarrassed if she mispronounced a word or expressed incorrect information. If corrected, she would simply say Oh , look pensively at the person and continue with the conversation. Molly continually asked questions about the science books she was reading or showed me something she had learned. Some situations puzzled her — for instance, she once said to me, I notice there are only two man (sic) teachers in the school and I wonder why? (Personal communication, September 19, 2002). Molly was also very expressive when engaged in any type of drama activity or when she read aloud. On one occasion, she had the class in stitches when she read aloud, with a great deal of animation, a chapter from a Captain Underpants book (Pilkey, 1997).

During the year, Molly participated in a weekly pullout group of gifted girls who engaged in various mini research projects. The group consisted of three girls from two different grade one classes. A stay-at-home mother, who was also a teacher, brought the students to the library for one hour a week. As a group, they decided on a topic of study, and then checked the Internet, encyclopedias and applicable non-fiction books, for relevant information. In my class she had been part of a strong group of students who were often given more challenging assignments. These assignments included writing different endings to classic fairy tales, writing book reports on various genres of books and presenting them to the class, responding to literature by using drama or readers theatre and by journaling, writing newspaper reports, and painting. Over the course of that year, I noticed that Molly became fully engaged in the activity if it was of her choosing — which meant that it often involved making some kind of information booklet on a science topic. She worked on them during spare moments, finished them in a few days and often read research books from the school library while I was teaching. My attempts at engaging her in fiction, fun grammar activities or fantasy story writing met with little success. I usually found remnants of such activities, like instruction sheets or half-finished booklets stuffed at the back of her desk weeks after the assignment had been suggested. I was curious as to why only science topics intrigued her and why she only liked reading science picture books. Her reading further intrigued me after she read a fiction book aloud. I noticed she read very quickly, paid little attention to the punctuation, stopped the reading often to tell me a related fact or personal story, and at the end when I asked what she thought the story was about, I found she had missed what I saw as the main storyline. Instead, she had focused on an aspect of the story that dealt with astronomy. I wondered if she did this often.

The year was a busy one with my attention divided between teaching full-time, completing the last course in my doctoral program and looking for a research topic. By year s end I decided to do a case study on this gifted child. Molly s mother knew I had become fascinated by the phenomenon of giftedness because of her daughter and she encouraged me to study Molly s school experience. Another reason for choosing to do this study was the number of times my readings indicated that there was a lack of research in the area of gifted females in elementary school. I also suspected that Molly s open and inquisitive personality would help make the research project a fascinating learning journey.

My research question, however, did not surface until I followed her into grade two. She was in a class of 25 students, and had two teachers. I was not one of her teachers. Her English teacher, Lynn, had never taught grade two and had never used the new English program that the school bought for all grade levels. Although Lynn was aware that Molly needed to be challenged in the language arts program, she had not implemented new initiatives. I was concerned that if Molly was not challenged she would become bored and lose her enthusiasm for learning. I assessed Molly s reading using several different reading measurements, at the beginning of her grade two year. These tests, combined with the observations I made during the language arts periods, showed that she continued to maintain her relative advantage over the majority of her peers in French and English reading and in her verbal abilities in both languages. I wondered how she maintained this advantage - if she did anything differently than the other children when she read in French and English. This led me to the purpose of this study and the statement of the problem.

Purpose of the Case Study

The purpose of this case study was to come to a better understanding of the French and English reading experiences of a gifted girl in the context of a French immersion classroom. As a teacher, I know that every student s reading development is a unique combination of his or her personal style, cognitive development and reading instruction. By studying Molly s reading in the context of two languages, I was able to follow her reading progress and discover the unique aspects of what she did in reading events. My goal was to discover the reasons, internal, external or a combination of both, that allowed for her continued high achievement and performance in reading relative to her non-gifted peers. Specifically, in this case study I looked at the genres of books that

Molly read in French and English, the strategies she used when reading in both languages and the levels of text difficulty of the books she chose in French and English. Equally important in understanding her reading experiences in two languages was examining Molly s responses to texts because these gave me further insights into her reading development.

Statement of the Problem

In order to arrive at a better understanding of Molly s reading experiences, my research was guided by this question: How is this girl, identified as gifted in kindergarten, different from the other children in what she reads, how she reads, and what she does with what she reads in French and English?

Significance of the Study

As a contribution to the body of research on giftedness, this descriptive case study was designed to contribute to the limited information about the French and English reading experiences of gifted girls in elementary school and how their experiences differ from those of regular students. Insights gained from describing these experiences will have an impact on how the French and English reading development of gifted girls in elementary school is understood in the future and will enable teachers to improve the support they offer students gifted in reading, in the regular classroom.

This study also benefited me as a researcher and a teacher by increasing my awareness of the learning paths other girls gifted in reading may take. It helped me offer appropriate challenges to others gifted in reading. This study further informs parents, other educators and colleagues about how and what gifted girls read in French and English.

Definition of Giftedness

For the purpose of this study, I used the more traditional definition of giftedness proposed by Alberta Education because it was the one adopted by the school system I work in and it was the one on which district initiatives were based - where giftedness is exceptional potential and/or performance across a wide range of abilities in one or more of the following areas: general intellectual; specific academic; creative thinking; social; musical; artistic; and kinesthetic (Retrieved September, 2002 from http://lss.ecsd.net/gifted). Molly was considered intellectually gifted with high verbal and reading abilities.

There was, however, a more contemporary view of giftedness that was gaining acceptance in the research literature. In this view giftedness is not seen as something innate or given , in terms of inner traits, characteristics, attributes, abilities and personality, but rather it is seen as a process of becoming . Proponents of this view (Shore, 2000; Gardner, 2000) see giftedness from a broader perspective - as multi-faceted. The development of potential of all students is stressed and they encourage fostering gifted *behaviors* through enrichment programs rather than designing a differentiated program after a gifted student has been identified. The principal of Molly s school seemed to subscribe to this view, believing that all children were gifted in some way and programs that enriched all students were encouraged.

Chapter Two

Like trees we have our common roots,
But our growth is very different.
Nancy Wood, *Many Winters*

Review of the Literature

Gifted girls, like gifted boys, require special educational accommodations in the classroom and exhibit some of the same learning and personal characteristics. However, gifted girls encounter particular problems related to gender in school that can affect their self-image, their school experience, and the realization of their potential. This review of the literature is divided into three sections. The first section looks at the different approaches to giftedness, program planning, program delivery, the consequences when gifted student s learning needs are not met, and the special educational and emotional needs of gifted girls. The second section of the review of literature examines different theories of reading, including the strategies associated with these theories, the strategies good readers use, and the types of books girls read. The last section briefly examines the benefits and challenges of reading in two languages.

Intellectually Gifted Girls

Programs for the gifted. One of the main objectives in the early primary grades is to help children acquire the strategies to become proficient readers. However, intellectually gifted children often start school as proficient readers (Freeman, 1985; Hegeman, 1987; Porter, 1999; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson & Boyce, 1996) and do not require the same instruction or experiences as their peers (Feldhusen, VanTassel-Baska & Seeley, 1989; Jackson, 1992; Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990; Porter, 1999; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson & Boyce, 1996). Clark (1992) indicated that intellectually gifted children are normally two to eight years ahead of their peers academically. She also stated that optimizing the early learning periods was extremely important for actualizing gifted children s potential. Therefore, traditionally organized classes that relied on group instruction, a set curriculum, instruction by subject with similar experiences for everyone was not adequate for gifted education (Clark, 1992; Coleman & Cross, 2001; Dean, 1998; Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2000; Smutny, Walker & Meckstroth, 1997; Smutny, 1998a;). These readings suggested that in order to develop the potential of the intellectually gifted, students needed access to a rich variety of literature and needed opportunities to respond actively and creatively to what they were reading (Feldhusen, VanTassel-Baska & Seeley, 1989; Freeman, 1985; Gallagher, 1985; Klein & Tannenbaum, 1992; Porter, 1999). It was also noted that the advanced intellectual skills of gifted children created special challenges for teachers in curriculum and program planning.

In creating programs for gifted students, Alberta Education, for example, requires schools and teachers to modify the curriculum in ways that meet the identified needs of their gifted students. Sisk (1987) proposed that elementary language arts programs for gifted children include (a) the integration of reading and writing, (b) a wide variety of reading materials in every subject area, (c) listening, speaking and problem solving activities and, (d) opportunities to engage in critical as well as creative reading. Other researchers had similar ideas for gifted program planning.

Research by Clark (1992), Friedman and Shore (2000), Pendarvis, Howley and Howley (1990), and Smutny, Walker and Meckstroth (1997), suggested that programs for the gifted should include open-ended activities that encourage higher level thinking skills. They also stated that programs should include activities that have a high degree of complexity and variety in their content, in their methods of delivery and in their finished product. In addition, these researchers suggested that when creating programs the pace of learning should be accelerated and allowances made for children to pursue their chosen interests in-depth. There is agreement in the literature that school programs for gifted students should involve modifications to the learning environment, to curriculum content and to cognitive strategies (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Dean, 1998; Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2000; Smutny, 1998a; Smutny, Walker & Meckstroth, 1997).

Modifications to the learning environment could be done in a variety of ways but mostreported in the literature were designed to bring gifted students together for instruction for a certain period of time. Adaptations included flexible pacing which allowed students to progress through material at their own pace; different sorts of ability grouping and classes, with the aim to have gifted students work together on more in-depth or advanced curriculum; and the organization of special courses such as honors or advanced placement courses that allowed students to study at advanced levels (Coleman & Cross, 2001).

The most common form of ability grouping at the elementary level was the pull-out program (Winner, 1996). This is a periodic enrichment time, usually once or twice a week, where gifted children work either independently or with a small group, engage in mini-research projects, conduct experiments, or some other kind of enrichment activity. Most researchers agreed that pull-out programs were advantageous because gifted students had an opportunity to work at their level of ability, and in their area of interest with other gifted children (Clark, 1992; Dean, 1998; Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2000; Coleman & Cross, 2001). Unfortunately, many elementary schools had weak, ineffective pull-out programs where students engaged in enrichment activities that offered little challenge and other elementary schools had no pull-out programs (Feldhusen, VanTassel-Baska & Seeley, 1989).

Kulik and Kulik (1997) conducted meta-analyses of studies of different gifted programs and found that gifted children who were educated separately performed somewhat better than gifted children who remained in heterogeneous classrooms. Clark (1997) also found that special classes in certain subject areas were especially appropriate for mild and moderately gifted students because they would be challenged to their full potential and not be tempted to hide their gifts in order to be accepted. Although special classes for the gifted had been shown to be beneficial, this method of program delivery was not a feasible alternative for most schools because of lack of funding. The school that Molly attended had neither pull-out programs nor special classes for the gifted. Another alternative to meeting gifted students educational needs was modification of the curriculum content.

Modifying the curriculum was not a new practice for many teachers, as they had been adapting curriculum for struggling learners for many years. The strategies were different however, and modifications to the gifted child s curriculum included curriculum acceleration and enrichment. These strategies were designed to move the gifted student through the curriculum at a faster rate, allowing students to master increasingly complex ideas using higher levels of thinking (Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2000). Acceleration was a controversial topic in gifted education and had several meanings. It could mean early school admission, skipping grades, advanced placement in particular subjects or telescoping grades — also known as compacting the curriculum. The process of content enrichment expanded the subject matter and provided for a greater appreciation of the topic under study. Content enrichment was the one most often used in the classroom because it required no change in content, just differentiated assignments to enrich the student s perspective in certain areas (Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2000). There was general acceptance in the literature that enrichment and acceleration should be complementary programming variables (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Smutny, Walker & Meckstroth, 1997; Smutny, 1998a).

The modification of cognitive strategies in gifted program planning involved the enhancement of thinking skills, of creativity, and of problem solving and problem finding in different activities. The teacher, in the creation of the gifted student s Individual Program Plan (IPP) most often does this type of differentiation of instruction. Whether or not differentiation of the curriculum, as suggested in the student s IPP, was actually carried out in the classroom was of concern to some researchers (Reis & Purcell, 1993). Although gifted student s needed as much special instruction as students with difficulty, there were seldom special classes or resource personnel made available for them (Clark, 1997). This situation often led to loss of ability among gifted girls by forcing them to regress towards the average ability level of the classroom. As I followed Molly s reading experiences in school, I wondered if she would begin to show signs of underachievement.

Gifted underachievers. Gifted underachievers are those who never achieve the level of performance that their scores on intelligence and aptitude tests predicted for them (Seeley, 1989). The failure of these children to realize their potential is a tragic loss to society because of their forfeited contributions (Porter, 1999). The causes, which can show up in the first years of school, are usually attributed to environmental circumstances such as an unstimulating curriculum or peer group pressure; emotional difficulties such as low self-esteem; or the cause could be a function of undiagnosed learning difficulties (Porter, 1999; Rimm, 1986; Whitmore, 1980). Clark (1997) reviewed more than 21 studies on gifted underachievement and compiled a list of characteristics shared by many of the underachievers. They included: poor study habits, unwillingness to complete work, distrust of adults, rebellion, poor self-concept, low self-esteem, expectations of academic and social failure, and low aspirations.

Baum, Renzulli and Hebert (1995) studied 17 gifted underachievers between the ages of 8 and13, and found that the combination of social, emotional and behavioral problems, along with learning difficulties and curriculum conflicts, were factors that contributed to the students underachievement in school. Some researchers stated that far more girls dumb themselves down than boys, not only because they were under-challenged but also because it was a way for them to win social acceptance (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990; Kerr, 1997; Porter, 1999; Sadker & Sadker, 1995; Smutney, 2003; Winner, 1996). Estimating the prevalence of gifted underachievers and identifying some of their key academic and personal characteristics was the focus of a study by Lupart and Pyryt (1996). A group of 58 gifted underachievers from a large Canadian school district were administered *the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised (WJPB-R)*, the *Peirs-Harris Self-Concept Scale*, and the *Thinking about My School* instruments. They found that: (a) scores on the student s WJPB-R were higher than their course grades; (b) at the junior high level, students showed a significant decline in their attitudes toward school, girls in particular; and (c) overall achievement declined as students progressed from grade 4 to grades 7 and 10 (Lupart & Pyryt, 1996). Although Molly s attitude towards school remained positive and her achievement continued to surpass that of her non-gifted peers, there was the possibility that these conditions could have changed.

Delisle (1994) presented an alternative view of underachievement by pointing out that few of us ever achieve to our full potential. Instead, we balance our academic or career attainments with other demands and interests and although we may not do as well as others thought we could or should, perhaps it was because we found fulfillment elsewhere. He went on to say that the underachieving label was an unfortunate one because it often put the blame on what was perceived to be a troublesome gifted student. However, the underachievement exhibited by a troublesome gifted student could have been the result of an inappropriate learning environment or it could have been a conscious choice on the part of the gifted individual not to conform to conventional ways of learning. Perhaps the gifted individual found happiness and fulfillment elsewhere. It has been recognized that achievement in adolescence and adulthood came from habits, interests, attitudes, and motivations formed in elementary school (Whitmore, 1980). Therefore, it is important for educators to understand the phenomenon in order to prevent the development of early patterns of underachievement. At the beginning of this study, I did not see Molly dumbing herself down , underachieving, or exhibiting signs of non-conformism, but as the study continued I attended to the possibility that these patterns could emerge.

Characteristics of gifted girls. Along with identified special educational concerns related to gifted children in general, the literature also identified the special needs and concerns of gifted girls. Although the same traditional measures were used to identify both gifted males and females, there were significant differences in patterns of achievement based on gender as well as differences in the characteristics that were exhibited (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990; Feldhusen, VanTassel-Baska & Seeley, 1989; Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990; Reis, 1998b; Silverman, 1986).

Kerr (1994) suggested that some of the main characteristics of gifted females in childhood included: being well-adjusted; possessing greater social knowledge ; having play interests similar to those of gifted males rather than average females; having higher career aspirations; and the tendency to outperform gifted boys throughout the elementary grades. Tuttle, Becker and Sousa (1988) contended that the reason gifted girls outperformed gifted boys in the elementary grades was because they developed at a more rapid rate than boys which resulted in higher scores on IQ tests and a higher proportion entering school early. Not only did they start school earlier, but fewer gifted females dropped out of school compared to their male counterparts. The reason given for their superior performance however, was not a shared one (Smutny, 1998a; Silverman; 1986). Smutny (1998a) maintained that gifted girls made themselves invisible and that teachers should not rely solelyon performance and standardized tests to identify them. According to Smutny, gifted girls dealt with common emotional struggles such as perfectionism, low self-esteem, and fear of failure that resulted in lower scores on standardized tests. She suggested that the focus should be on the behaviors that indicated giftedness rather than on standardized tests. Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2000) also supported the view that gender differences in self-perception limited girls intellectual performance and that the differences were related to societal expectations.

Veenker and Veenker (1998) suggested that gifted girls performance in school was affected by a biased curriculum as well as differential treatment by school personnel. Basing their observations on results of the 1992 American

Association of University Women s research summary on the status of women in American schools, they contended that teachers reacted differently to girls. For example, some of the differential reactions included girls being praised for neatness, appearance and penmanship while boys were encouraged to explore, push limits, and try new things. Many of the pre-school activities were geared towards the traditional working assumption that children needed impulse control training, small muscle development and language enhancement in order to succeed in school — areas that girls were already competent in upon arrival in pre-school (Veenker & Veenker, 1998). Gender inequity continued to be problematic in school settings as well as in the literature, where boys are still overwhelmingly portrayed as doers, professionals, and producers, and girls as watchers, helpers and consumers (Veenker & Veenker, 1998, p. 211).

Interestingly, Smutny, Walker and Meckstroth (1997) wrote that gifted girls saw more disadvantages to being gifted than did gifted boys. They contended that many gifted girls could be too adaptable and as they grew older their self-esteem and career aspirations diminished from a socialization process that often adjusted their aspirations to lesser goals.

Although gifted girls had special educational and emotional needs, the label gifted created problems for both genders. The Gulbenkian Research Project on Gifted Children (Freeman, 1979) studied seventy children whose parents had identified their child as being gifted and had subsequently joined the National Association for Gifted Children — an organization which did not require objective testing (Freeman, 1985). These children were studied over a four-year period during which the researchers looked in detail at the often-quoted characteristics of gifted children. One of the observations made was that children who had been labeled gifted sometimes had more social problems than those who had not been labeled. Although there was no proof that the labeling itself was the cause of the problems, several plausible explanations were given: (a) labeling a child gifted caused him or her to perform as such and compounded the child s feeling of being different; (b) perhaps gifted children were odder to begin with; and (c) perhaps parents who labeled their children gifted were those who pressured them too much and it was the pressure to excel rather than the label that was the cause of the social problems (Winner, 1996).

In an important study on women s psychological development — the Harvard Project on Women s Psychology and Girls Development - Brown and Gilligan (1992) interviewed and listened to the voices of nearly one hundred, seven to eighteen year old students at the Laurel School for girls in Cleveland, Ohio over a five year period. In order to better understand women s psychology, the authors decided to follow women s psychological development back through girls adolescence and childhood. From the girls, Brown, Gilligan and their team of psychologists, were able to hear detailed descriptions of what happened in the world in which the girls were living, psychologically. While the authors supported the findings of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) in that connection and responsive relationships were central to women s psychological development, they also found that girls experienced a relational impasse or crisis of connection during their adolescence. Brown and Gilligan observed the girls in their study giving up relationship for the sake of Relationships deliberately, because they felt they had no other alternative. The girls struggled over speaking and not speaking, knowing and not knowing, feeling and not feeling, and we [the authors] see the makings of an inner division as girls come to a place where they feel they cannot say or feel or know what they have experienced — what they have felt and known (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 4). Although not specifically stated, this relational impasse was also supported by insights in Calic-Newman s (2003) aptly entitled chapter on gifted girls — Underachieving Politely, Blending Perfectly, Disappearing Quietly, Succeeding Differently. This crisis of connection became evident during this study, as Molly tried to construct her reality in relation to her peers and her family while staying true to herself.

Characteristics of gifted children who are strong readers. Gifted children who were strong readers, especially gifted girls, exhibited certain characteristics and preferences that were different from the norm. Pendarvis, Howley and Howley (1990) examined early studies and found that gifted children, in general, read more widely and more often, were more interested in reading, and were better readers than other children. The studies also revealed that gifted children tended to select classics, biographies, nature books, fairy tales, folk tales, and legends more than other children when reading for pleasure. Since early childhood, Molly has read and shown an almost exclusive interest in science books, particularly those about animals.

Molly, like many other intellectually gifted children, demonstrated early precocious reading ability. Jackson (1992) observed that manifestation of early reading ability influenced an adult s perception of and expectations for the child. The precocious children in his studies were typically pre-kindergarteners whose reading comprehension level was beginning grade two and who had been effective word readers from the age of four or earlier (Jackson, 1992). He stated that precocious reading ability may influence a young child s development, not only by its direct effects in opening up new modes of learning, but also by changing adults expectations and the child s social environment (p.172). He also found that children who were early precocious readers had frequent and early access to, and enjoyed, reading readiness toys, books and television programs such as Sesame Street and Electric Company. These may have contributed to the development of their precocious reading ability. Jackson and Butterfield (1989) studied the skill patterns of precocious readers who were level-matched with second graders and found that text-reading speed was the greatest strength of precocious readers. However, they did not find evidence that precocious readers used strategies that were different from those of other readers in identifying words or reading texts. Mills and Jackson (1990) noted that elements of the precocious readers temperaments, interests, or motivational patterns might contribute to their reading precocity and to their sustained achievement. It was interesting to note the extent to which these elements were contributing factors in Molly s reading development.

Although the following research did not deal directly with gifted students, the findings had a bearing on this case in that Molly s reading choices may have been more related to her gender than her giftedness. Hall and Coles (1998) reviewed the findings of the *1994 Children s Reading Choices* survey and discussed the differences between girls and boys reading choices and habits, including favorite genres, preferences for fiction or non-fiction, and attitudes towards reading in general. Briefly summarized, they found that:

> 1. Girls read and re-read more than boys do.
> 2. Girls read comparatively more narrative fiction - adventure, horror/ghost, animal and school related stories and more poetry. Only crime and detective works were evenly balanced in popularity between the sexes.
> 3. Few children read non-fiction exclusively, but those that do tend to be boys.
> 4. Girls have a more positive attitude towards reading.
> 5. Both sexes were able to clearly articulate the influence of gender on reading and emphasized the importance of peer group activities and expectations in determining their reading habits (p. 84).

Molly exhibited most of the reading habits indicated above but her love of non-fiction books, and the fact that she read them almost exclusively, differentiated her from most girls in relation to this study.

According to Freeman (1985), gifted readers were capable of quick and easy mechanical reading but often read fluently at the expense of meaning and expression. Torrance (1965) pointed out that some gifted children became over trained in becoming critical or retention readers and had difficulty becoming creative readers. Critical readers read a text and looked for its biases and deficiencies while retention readers read to absorb and remember all of the facts. Torrance observed that it was not the amount of information possessed that allowed people to think creatively, solve problems, and make good decisions, but the way they stored this information and their attitude towards it. One of the ways children gained a realistic view of the world was through creative reading. Since most gifted children were avid readers, improving their skills as creative readers might influence their performance in other areas of the curriculum. To describe what happened when a person read creatively, Torrance (1965) stated:

> When a person reads creatively, he is sensitive to problems and possibilities in whatever he reads. He makes himself aware of the gaps in knowledge, the un-solved problems, the missing elements, things that are incomplete or out of focus. .the creative reader sees new relationships, creates new combinations, synthesizes relatively unrelated elements into a coherent whole, redefines or transforms certain pieces of information to discover new uses, and builds onto what is known .he produces a large number of possibilities, uses a great variety of strategies or approaches, looks at the available information in a variety of ways, breaks away from commonplace solutions develops his idea by filling in the details and

making the idea attractive and exciting to others (p. 61-62).

Teachers could help students become creative readers by heightening the expectations and the anticipation as they engaged in a reading task and by permitting or encouraging them to do something with what is read. The development of Molly s creative thinking and reading abilities would be one way of cultivating her gifted potential. If this was one of the program goals in the education of intellectually gifted children, perhaps the performance decline of gifted females, noted in the junior high years, would be averted or at least be less damaging.

The literature generally supported the notion that gifted females do well in elementary school and their performance begins to decline in the junior and senior high years. The reasons given for this pattern of decline arise from (a) a socialization process which teaches them conformity to role expectations with an overemphasis on tradition and on necessary conformity, (b) a fear of failure and the unknown, (c) an avoidance of frustration and (d) low self-evaluation (Feldhusen, VanTassel-Baska & Seeley, 1989; Kerr, 1994; Klein & Tannenbaum, 1992; Silverman, 1986; Tuttle, Becker & Sousa, 1988). I wondered how the positive and negative social, emotional and environmental forces that affected the realization of potential of gifted girls would affect Molly s progress in French and English reading.

I did not find any studies that examined the French and English reading experiences of a gifted girl. This was consistent with what Goldsmith (2000) pointed out, that there was a need for more research on what exactly gifted children know and understand about their domains and about how their talent developed over time — especially gifted girls. The literature indicated that to extend these understandings, detailed, domain-based studies about the abilities and experiences of gifted girls was needed (Chmiliar, 1997; Friedman & Shore, 2000; Gardner; 2000; Goldsmith, 2000; Porath, 1991; Robinson, 2000).

In summary, this section of the review of the literature examined programming for gifted students, the various components that went into creating a challenging program, as well as the phenomenon of underachievement in gifted students. An examination of the literature concerning the characteristics of gifted children who are strong readers and gifted girls was undertaken to raise awareness of the special problems that exist for this sub-group of gifted students and to facilitate a better understanding of Molly s reading development in two languages.

Reading

Reading is a complex developmental process that researchers have been studying for decades. An overview of the historical conceptualizations of reading was important to undertake, to understand how the theories of reading evolved and to recognize the mediating factors that would affect my interpretations. In order to be able to pinpoint what was unique about Molly s reading experiences, it was also necessary to have an understanding of the different aspects of the reading event itself. To this end, this section of the review of literature briefly examines the evolution of the theories of reading, including the reading models associated with these theories. It also includes sections on the strategies good readers use, the types of books girls read, and the reasons for using different types of books in reading instruction.

Theories of Reading

Straw (1990) outlined five historical phases in the conceptualizations of reading and the reading process: the Transmission, Translation, Interaction, Transaction and Social Construction Periods. Although I indicated approximate time frames (taken from Straw, 1990) for each of the historical phases, there is a great deal of overlap between where one phase ends and the other begins.

In the Transmission Period (late nineteenth, beginning twentieth century), the conceptualization of reading was that information, knowledge or meaning resided in the author and was transferred to the reader via the text. A good reader was one who could reproduce the author s intent. This conceptualization of reading was reinforced in the schools because education was seen as the movement of information from the teacher to the passive learner or tabula rasa (Straw, 1990). The procedures of reading and interpreting were not considered important and the process of reading was defined by a reader s knowledge of the author and his or her probable intentions.

The conceptualizations of reading in the Translation Period (1900 to about 1965) reflected the lifestyle changes of society after the Industrial Revolution (Straw, 1990). With an increase in society s leisure time, this period also marked an increase in the amount of informative, instructional, and entertainment material written. There was a marked shift from a text s message being explicit (in the informative and instructional material), to it being implicit (in the entertainment material). The meaning was now seen to reside in the text and the reader s job was to decode the message that lay in its structure and style. The realization that a reader needed some kind of skill to decode a text led educators to develop skills models of reading comprehension (Straw, 1990). The models were bottom-up, sequential, with an emphasis on the acquisition of grammar and phonics skills. These information processing theories of reading, characteristic of this period, continue to influence school language arts programs. Grammar texts and phonics drill books are still being published and bought in various forms, including the computer program form, and grammar and phonics are still a part of many language arts programs (Binkley, Phillips & Norris, 1994).

The reading theories of the Interaction Period (mid-1950 s to about 1970) reflected the belief that a text s meaning resided with the reader and the text. It was assumed that readers needed knowledge of the author, of texts, and needed personal experiences, in order to understand a text. A good reader was considered one whose background knowledge most closely resembled the text (Straw, 1990). During this Period, a psycholinguistic view of reading developed, where the reader s background experience with oral language and their powers of conceptualization were used to derive meaning from print (Binkley, Phillips & Norris, 1994). It was believed that there was interaction between the vernacular speech of the student and the formal language of school and text. Schema theories arose during this phase. In schema theories, a reader s world knowledge is stored in cognitive structures called schemata . These organized sets of concepts are triggered and used in response to stimuli from the text.

They provide much of the basis for understanding, learning and remembering the ideas of texts (Anderson, 1984). Interactive models of reading were popular during this period including those espoused by Goodman (1970) and Smith (1973).

The conceptualizations of reading formed during the Transaction Period (from 1970 to about 1990) were probably the most widely held views to date (Straw, 1990). Transactional theories saw reading as a social, linguistic and cognitive process (Binkley, Phillips & Norris, 1994). Meaning was created by the active negotiation of the readers, their backgrounds and the texts they were reading. The three previous phases assumed the purposes of reading were related to a communicative act. Meaning was thought to reside first in the author, then in the text and then in a combination of the two. But meaning was always out there to be discovered. However, during the Transaction Period, reading was seen as a more generative act — where the reader constructed both the meaning and the significance of a text during the reading event (Rosenblatt, 1985). Although readers of all ages were expected to read in the same manner, their interpretations would vary due to dissimilarities in their knowledge bases. Another area of difference between the first three Periods and this one, were the assumptions concerning comprehension. The Transmission, Translation and Interaction Periods assumed that meaning was knowable in an objective sense, that it was measurable and that it was static (Straw, 1990). In the Transaction Period, meaning was seen to be indeterminate because no two readers generate the same meaning from a text, nor would a reader generate exactly the same meaning when reading the same text twice. Consequently, reading theories and practices during this phase were more holistic in nature. Children read for purposes that were personally meaningful to them and school reading programs provided opportunities for the sharing of and reflections on their readings (Binkley, Phillips & Norris, 1994).

The last phase discussed is the current one — the Social Construction Period. Theories in this phase reflect the belief that knowledge is socially patterned and taught. Meaning is a result of social experiences and interactions, and all knowledge and knowledge construction are essentially social acts (Straw, 1990). Language is a personal, social and functional phenomenon that is learned as its functions are learned (Binkley, Phillips & Norris, 1994; Vygotsky, 1962).

The evolution of reading as social and cultural construction carried with it expectations that the constructions would be different depending upon how children were taught, what they took reading to be, and the practices that shaped how texts were read. In Molly s case, it was important to note whether she continued to read voraciously, whether she acquired more sophisticated strategies, and whether she continued to cultivate her reading independence.

Reading Programs and Strategies

The kinds of reading instruction and reading practices that occur in schools vary widely. In order to recognize what Molly did differently than her peers in reading, it was necessary to recognize the kinds of instructional strategies teachers used and the kinds of strategies gifted readers used, as both these factors would impact Molly s reading experiences.

There continue to be conflicting opinions about the best ways to teach reading. The once popular literature-based reading programs and whole language instruction have been replaced by various adaptations of the balanced literacy program, and phonics language instruction has been regaining popularity as well. Despite attempts by teachers to improve their language arts curriculum, many continued to use commercial reading programs for the majority of their instruction (Aldrich, 1996). Popular commercial reading programs such as *Cornerstones* and *Connections* were based on the balanced literacy approach and although the terminology has changed — basal readers are now called anthologies — I believe the problems that were associated with commercial reading programs in the past, remain the same today. According to Goodman (1989), the problems associated with basal reader programs were many: (a) the student texts prescribed a controlled learning sequence; (b) they contained simplified vocabulary; (c) teachers were required to follow a prescribed script; (d) only 10 to 15% of time was actually spent reading; (e) pre-reading activities limited student interpretation; (f) assessments were skills-based and; (g) reading was seen as word decoding. After a twelve-month review of all the major language arts series, Aldrich (1996), corroborating Goodman s (1989) findings, concluded that none of them provided enough challenge for the bright students. Little evidence was found of multi-stranded, in-depth activities where students might gain interdisciplinary perspectives, nor did many of the reading and writing tasks invite thoughtful inquiry.

Hoffman (1996) surveyed the existing research that had been conducted in elementary classrooms and schools and that focused on the nature of teaching and learning in developmental reading programs. He described the implementation and evaluation studies done in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the survey studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, the methods-comparison framework studies of the 1970s, and finally a series of studies carried out in the 1960s which were considered more of an anomaly than a trend because they investigated the nature of instruction in classrooms. The major research programs he described for each period examined various aspects of teaching and schooling and their effects in learning to read. According to Hoffman (1996), the research findings raised a number of important issues: (a) teacher effects in the organizing and pacing of instruction; (b) the differential treatment of good and poor reading groups; (c) comprehension instruction; (d) teacher explanations; and (e) the influence of curricular materials on instructional actions. He added that many of the studies revealed enormous discrepancies between the instruction offered in most classrooms and the kind of instruction that basic research suggests would most benefit learners (p. 944). Although he contended that we made remarkable progress in our understanding of the relationships among schools, teaching, and learning, we did not seem to be much further ahead in relation to how these understandings could result in student success in the classroom. How would this impact a student like Molly?

Another study, done by Fehrenbach (1991), compared the reading processing strategies of 60 eighth-, tenth-, and twelfth-grade students, and found that gifted students used the reading strategies of inferring, rereading, analyzing structure, watching or predicting, evaluating and relating to content area significantly more than average students. Average students used the reading strategies of word pronunciation and inaccurate summarizing more often than gifted students. The results of this study raised questions for me, as to the appropriateness of using basals as texts to promote or further develop the strategies that gifted learners used. At the beginning of the study, I noted that Molly used the strategies of rereading and predicting relatively frequently, but did not observe any of the other strategies mentioned above. In grade two, Molly s school started using a commercial language arts program (*Cornerstones*) at all grade levels. I wondered if Molly would maintain her relative advantage over her peers in her reading and verbal abilities, given the inappropriateness of these programs for gifted learners.

VanTassel-Baska, Zuo, Avery and Little (2002) stated that there was limited research evidence in respect to what worked with gifted students in language arts programs. They analyzed curriculum models used in gifted education and found little evidence to support approaches that were non-accelerative in orientation. Yet, they wrote, many school districts rarely used acceleration strategies with gifted students in language arts. The more common approach was to use advanced reading materials to satisfy advanced readers in the classroom (Van Tassel-Baska, Zuo, Avery & Little, 2002).

There seemed to be some consensus (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Porter, 1999; Sisk, 1987; Smutney, 2003) that a reading program for the gifted should be specialized and enhance critical and creative reading behaviors, but the few research studies that have focused on effective reading practices for the gifted have mixed findings (Van Tassel-Baska, Zuo, Avery & Little, 2002). In a study on precocious readers, Henderson, Jackson and Mukamal (1993) found that careful assessments needed to be made on the reader s specific areas of strength within the language arts area, to determine if all the skill patterns were advanced, and to determine if connections between skill areas (such as between reading and writing) were present. However, in another study (Aldrich & Mills, 1989), fifth and sixth graders participated in a literary analysis class once a week and showed significant gains on both reading comprehension and vocabulary when compared to a control group.

In a year long study, Brown, Pressley, Van Meter and Schuder (1996) compared the performance of weak grade two readers in transactional strategies instruction classes (they received comprehension strategies instruction in the classroom), with a group of weak grade two readers where comprehension instruction was not emphasized. There were five classrooms in each of the conditions. Four out of the five control classrooms exhibited a whole language approach and the fifth a skills oriented approach. The end results indicated that the transactional strategies instruction classroom students exhibited better, more active comprehension and memory than those who did not receive comprehension instruction. The acquisition of these skills was relevant for all readers but was particularly relevant for gifted students like Molly, because without further development of their capabilities in this area, their potential threatened to lie dormant or be lost.

Pressley (2002a) pointed out that good readers were very active as they read, using a variety of comprehension strategies when reading difficult text. Since good readers did not need to spend time on decoding strategies, more attention and resources were available for using comprehension strategies (Pressley, 2002a; Samuels, 2002). Pressley (2002a) commented that comprehension strategies could and should be taught in the primary grades because research showed they improved student understanding and memory of texts. He noted, however, that they were often not taught. The goal of reading instruction in the elementary grades, according to Pressley (2002b), should be to create metacognitively skilled readers. These are highly skilled readers who know that high comprehension requires active reading - predicting, questioning, imaging, clarifying, and summarizing while reading. Porter (1999) agreed, and stated that the acquisition of these skills should also be an integral part of the language arts program of the intellectually gifted because of the advanced development of their cognitive and verbal skills.

I did not find any studies describing the reading strategies gifted students used in the elementary grades. Most of the literature dealt with strategies that were appropriate for different types of giftedness at various higher grade levels. Since Molly mastered the basic decoding skills required for reading, and since reading comprehension would be increasingly dependent on linguistic and general knowledge as the texts became more complex, it would be important to note what kinds of strategies Molly used to comprehend texts. Equally important in discovering what she did differently in reading events would be to observe the language she used in her social interactions and in her interpretations of texts, whether oral or written, during reading events. Observations of the social aspects of Molly s reading events would provide insights into how she used what she read in combination with her background knowledge and perhaps also why she read.

Types of Books and Purposes for Reading

In order to understand Molly s reading experiences and her reading development in French and English, an examination of the types of books she chose to read and was required to read, as well as the purposes for reading these books, was necessary. Although Molly would undoubtedly continue to choose predominantly science books that met her thirst for knowledge, it would be interesting to note whether this interest would continue and if she would be taught critical and creative reading skills which could affect her reading habits.

Most children learn to read with narrative-based fiction books and these make up the majority of their reading materials during their first years in school (Dean, 1998). Many people assume that if children are able to read fiction books proficiently they will be able to read non-fiction books the same way. However, Reid and Bentley (1996) stressed the importance of showing students how to make meaning from the different approaches used in fiction and non-fiction texts and in showing them the different demands in reading that both types of text involved. Although this skill should be taught to all readers, it was particularly appropriate for able readers — even in grade one.

Dean (1998) observed that the real needs of able readers were often overlooked or neglected in the classroom. As long as these students continued to choose books, read, derive pleasure from their reading and manage independently, they were left alone. However, he asserted that learning about reading should not stop just because the able reader mastered the decoding and comprehension skills upon entry to school. He contended that more able readers in mixed ability classes should be sufficiently challenged by texts and be allowed to find alternative approaches to the readings. They should also reflect upon their work, articulating their skills and insights. However, he stated that it was not essential that the books able readers chose be increasingly difficult, more important was that the able reader encounter a full range of texts, over time, from which deeper insights could be gained. Although I believe able readers should encounter a full range of texts in order to gain deeper understandings of the different textual features and the subject matter, I am not convinced this can be done if the books are not sufficiently difficult so as to present a challenge to the reader. In order to satisfy the craving for knowledge that Molly displayed and given her reading abilities, the need for increasingly difficult texts was a necessary component of her reading development.

Baskin and Harris (1980) suggested six criteria for finding appropriate books for the gifted: (a) the language should be rich, varied, precise, complex and exciting; (b) they should be chosen with an eye to their open-endedness and their capacity to inspire contemplative behavior; (c) they should be complex enough to allow for interpretation and evaluation; (d) they should help build problem-solving skills and productive thinking; (e) they should provide characters as role models for emulation, and; (f) they should be broad-based in form (p.46). For many language arts teachers it was a challenge to choose books that enhanced the development of gifted student s thinking skills. An equally daunting task for these teachers was what to do with the books once they had them.

Cambourne (2002) argued that the ends of reading instruction are very much determined by the means employed to teach it. Students would understand and subsequently use reading quite differently depending upon whether they were taught to critique, question or contest texts or taught in ways that implied there was only one correct response or interpretation of a text. One of the goals in a language arts program for intellectually gifted students like Molly, would be to teach them that most texts are capable of multiple meanings — to have students think beyond the content of the story and speculate on its purposes and intentions. Cambourne (2002) asserted that learners should be expected and encouraged to think both critically and hypothetically as they check their own understanding at the metacognitive level.

In order to reflect on their reading, it is important that students be taught to recognize the distinguishing features of different types of texts. The organization, language and purposes of fiction and non-fiction books are very different and these differences need to be shown to the more able readers. It is a myth that good readers can navigate these texts themselves and discover their distinguishing features (Thomson, 1993). They need guided support so that they will be able to reflect on their progress in reading. Ultimately, good readers should be able to look at how the text and their response to it are influenced by larger cultural forces (Thomson, 1993).

This section of the review of the literature showed that intellectual growth in gifted children depended on their access to and regular involvement in the reading process. The types of books students chose to read or were required to read had an impact on the kinds of reading experiences they had and on the reading strategies they used. Choosing appropriate books for gifted children and using these books to teach higher level thinking skills, were important factors in curriculum planning for gifted students who were strong readers. It has been shown that reading extensively and learning the different skills required for reading different texts encourages critical and creative reading. As will be seen in the next section, extensive reading also makes reading in a second language somewhat easier.

Reading in a Second Language

One of the major principles of bilingual education was that literacy transferred across languages: If a child could read in one language, the general ability of being able to read would facilitate learning to read in another language (Krashen, 1996). Molly was a precocious reader and through her few years of school maintained an advantage in reading in English over that of her non-gifted peers. Since the beginning, Molly also demonstrated advanced reading ability in her second language, French. In order to understand her high achievement and performance in her French reading, it was necessary to look into whether reading ability was transferable to a second language and if she would therefore, use the same kinds of reading strategies in both languages. This section of the review of the literature examines the transferability of reading abilities from one language to another and the benefits and challenges of reading in two languages.

Krashen (1996) argued that there was a reasonable amount of evidence that showed reading in all languages was done and acquired in a similar way, and those who read well in one language tended to read well in a second language. In support of the transfer hypothesis, he detailed numerous studies to show that: (a) the underlying process of reading in different languages was similar, even when the languages and writing systems appeared to be very different; (b) the process of the development of literacy was similar in different languages; (c) when confounding factors were controlled, there were positive correlations between literacy development in first and second languages; and (d) bilingual programs in which children developed literacy in the primary language were successful in helping children develop literacy [in another language] (Krashen, 1996, p.23). In Molly s school, formal reading instruction in English commenced in grade one. It was felt that the child should learn to read in their primary language before attempting to read in their second language. Formal reading instruction in French began in grade two. Molly had already used some of the same reading strategies in her French reading in grade two that I had observed her use in English reading in grade one. It would be interesting to note whether her development in French reading would support the transfer hypothesis and whether it would give her other related educational benefits.

Piirto (1999) stated that intellectually gifted students were prime candidates for foreign language instruction because of their superior memories and analytic abilities. In learning a second language they would have the added educational advantage of being aware of the customs, habits, and thought patterns of two languages and the experience would also have a positive effect on their sensitivity and tolerance (Sisk, 1987). Foreign language classrooms could also support gifted students psychological growth. Feldhusen and Van Tassel-Baska (1989) stated that mastery of a second language gave gifted students a comprehensive understanding of the relative structures of languages and their related cultures. They also suggested that the goals of a foreign language program for the gifted should be: (a) to develop proficiency in reading, speaking, and writing in two languages; (b) to learn the culture and traditions that shape language; (c) to be challenged by the interrelationships across languages in respect to form and meaning and; (d) to appreciate and understand language systems (p. 224).

Garfinkel, Allen and Neuharth-Prtichett (1993) contended that a curriculum for the gifted should include affective objectives because gifted students personalized learning thereby enhancing their self-esteem and personal satisfaction. A curriculum that included these objectives encouraged students to express curiosity, to take risks, to use their imagination, and to become autonomous learners. They maintained that these outcomes could be achieved in foreign language classrooms. However, not all researchers viewed foreign language classrooms as an adequate challenge for gifted children.

Smith and Leroux (1989) analyzed research studies from three different educational indexes and bibliographies dating from 1978 to 1987. They looked at the enrichment practices for gifted children in regular primary grade classrooms and the pedagogical implications that these research results had for gifted children in elementary French immersion programs. The authors found that French immersion and enrichment were two different albeit complementary realities. Although the feat of learning a new language and following a double language arts program was an enriching experience, it was not enough of a challenge for gifted students (Smith & Leroux, 1989). They suggested that the important factors in a gifted elementary French immersion program were: (a) a child-centered curriculum that focuses on process rather than content; (b) the teaching of basic research skills; (c) an open and flexible environment; and (d) a caring and enthusiastic teacher. They found that French immersion teachers of gifted students had many hurdles to overcome in delivering an appropriate program for these children including the limited French vocabulary of students, an overloaded curriculum, and a lack of appropriate resources in French, especially for gifted students.

Shore (2000) had a slightly different view of the benefits or appropriateness of enhanced programs for the gifted. He commented that although gifted students achieved remarkable levels of bilingualism in second language immersion programs, these kinds of enhanced programs were also beneficial to less able students, in that these students would learn more than they would in a regular program. He suggested these enhanced programs be pilot or model programs for improvements in general education (Shore, 2000).

In summary, the review of the literature was divided into three sections in order to gain in-depth understandings in the relevant areas of this case study, which examined the reading experiences of a gifted girl, in a French immersion classroom. The first section examined the different ways of looking at giftedness and the effects these had on school programming and delivery. The phenomenon of gifted underachievers was touched upon to highlight what happened when gifted students needs were not met, and since gifted girls had different educational and emotional needs, the review of the literature also included a brief examination of this area as well. The second section of the review of literature included an overview of the theories of reading in order to understand their evolution, so that I would be able to recognize the mediating factors that would affect my interpretation of the data. In order to better understand Molly s reading experiences in French and English and to gain insights into her reading development in two languages, the strategies good readers use, the types of books girls read and the different purposes for using different kinds of books were also examined in this section. In the next section, I outline the research methodology and process of data collection and analysis used.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Case Study

The primary goal of my study was to come to a better understanding of the French and English reading experiences of a gifted girl in a French immersion classroom. To accomplish this goal, I chose a case study approach in order to provide a detailed examination of a single subject, (Borg & Gall, 1989) within its real-life context (Yin, 1994). In the case of Molly, I observed what she did differently than her peers, in her French and English reading experiences, within the context of her grades two, three and four French immersion classrooms. Stake (2000) contended that a case is a complex, functioning, specific, and unique integrated system in which its boundedness and behavior patterns were the key factors in its understanding.

Stake (2000), also stated that researchers had various purposes for studying cases and identified three types of studies:

1. Intrinsic Case Study — The case itself is of interest and study is undertaken to gain a better understanding of it. This type allows the case to reveal its story. Its purpose is not to come to understand an abstract construct nor is it undertaken to build on theory. Examples include studies on particular children, clinics, conferences or curriculum.
2. Instrumental Case Study — A particular case is studied to refine theory

or provide insight into an issue. The case is of secondary interest, playing a supportive role in facilitating an understanding in something else. An example would be studying a particular city in order to understand the phenomenon of Canadian culture.

3. Collective Case Study — It is an instrumental study that is extended to several cases where the cases are chosen because they manifest a common characteristic. Understanding them will lead to better understanding and theorizing about yet larger collection of cases. For example, a study of a particular group of schools might lead to a better understanding of how school improvement works (p. 237).

Researchers conducting intrinsic case studies cannot avoid generalizations, according to Stake (2000). However, they expect readers to comprehend their interpretations as well as to arrive at their own. Therefore, researchers should learn enough about the case to encapsulate complex meanings into a finite report but to describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings, and draw their own conclusions (Stake, 2000, p. 243).

My study was an intrinsic case study because its goal was to try and understand the French and English reading experiences of a gifted girl in the context of a French immersion classroom. This study was appropriate for case study research as it was specific, unique and occurred in a bounded context.

Selection of the Case

Denzin & Lincoln (2000) suggested that the most unique aspect of a case study was the selection of the case to be studied. The gifted child in this study was a student in my grade one classroom. She was the first identified gifted child that I had in my twelve-year teaching career and during the time I worked with her I became fascinated by the phenomenon of giftedness and I wanted an in-depth understanding of how she experienced French and English reading. The parents were also very curious regarding my wonders about their child. It was the mutual curiosity and the encouragement they extended that helped shape this study.

Research study

This research study consisted of a pre-study and a main study. The pre-study began in May 2002 and continued until April 2003. The main study started in May 2003 and continued until June 2004. What I describe below, in terms of data collection, applied to the pre-study as well as the main study.

Pre-study. To obtain preliminary insights into the child s classroom and home language arts experiences during Molly s first two years of school, a pre-study began in the spring of 2002. It was important for me to talk with the parents and the child about the language arts experiences that occurred in her early childhood, when it was first noticed she could read - in kindergarten, when she was first identified as being gifted; and in grade one, when the formal teaching of language arts began. The information was needed to establish a beginning point to assist me in understanding her academic progress in this area. The pre-study informed the questions asked in the main study and allowed me to track changes in the area of reading. The data gathered in the pre-study included interviews with Molly, interviews with her parents, in-class sessions with Molly, and written artifacts. An ethics review and an extension were completed and approved for the pre-study.

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with Molly and two with her parents, each of which was approximately one hour in length, during May and June of 2002. The interview questions were used as guides to gather as much background information as possible regarding Molly s early language abilities, and to find out what experiences she related to her parents. The second interview with the parents was conducted to clarify any information received in the first interview and enabled me to ask new questions that arose from analyzing the data from the first interview. The parents were given transcripts of the interviews to read and were invited to respond. The interview with Molly needed to be carried out over two noon hour recesses because although she liked to talk, she quickly became impatient with the questions. Another interview with the parents was conducted in September 2002, at the beginning of her third year of school (grade two), to continue the information gathering process on Molly s reading experiences. My goal was to find out whether the parents had noticed any changes in Molly s reading habits or experiences, at school or at home. These were informal interviews, with no prepared questions. They were transcribed and the parents were again invited to read them and respond. References to the interviews in the chapters are labeled as INT #1, INT #2 and INT #3.

In-class sessions with Molly were usually held during recess time. The decision to stay during these times was voluntary and Molly usually asked me in the morning whether or not she could stay in during either one of the recesses, to read to me. The choice of reading material was normally left to her, although I did suggest, from time to time, that she try reading a different type of book. The six sessions, conducted in the spring of 2002, were taped and transcribed. I wrote field notes on some in-class observations during the spring of 2002 and on in-class observations from September 2002 to June 2004. These were all included in the data collection — field notes are indicated in the chapters by the letters FN and the date, and recordings done during recesses are referenced in the chapters by the letters RR and the date.

The last source of data obtained from the pre-study were a variety of written materials, in French and English, such as stories, journal entries, book reports, unit tests, and mini research projects that were done independently in class, while in grade one. I also obtained copies of several journal entries done in kindergarten, and received copies of the results of the psychological (*WPPSI-R)* and academic (*Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement*) tests that had been conducted during her first year of school.

Data collection — main study

A substantial amount of data needs to be collected in a case study in order to clearly represent the phenomenon. Qualitative data consists of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge obtained through open-ended interviews and informal conversations, detailed descriptions of people s activities, behaviors, actions recorded in field notes and excerpts, quotations or entire passages, extracted from various types of documents such as formal and informal work samples (Patton, 1990, p.10). The methods of data collection for this research study included: (a) in-class observations and the administering of reading inventories, tests and surveys; (b) informal conversations; (c) open-ended interviews; and (d) a collection of work samples in French and English.

Observations. The twice-weekly observations of in-classroom work that started in September 2002 (at the start of grade two) continued during the main study. Data were the field notes written on in-classroom observations. Additional data consisted of work samples and writing samples in French and English, and the results of reading inventories, tests and surveys, gathered at different times of the year. The following inventories, tests and surveys were used: (a) the *Stieglitz Informal Reading Inventory* (Stieglitz, 1992) - for the silent reading passages; (b) the *Qualitative Reading Inventory II* (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995) - for reading aloud passages; (c) the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test* (MacGinitie et al., 1989) - given by the home room teacher; (d) the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (3rd Ed.)* (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) - for vocabulary development; (e) the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* (McKenna & Kear, 1990) and the *Denver Writing Attitude Survey* (Davis & Rhodes, 1991) - to follow attitudinal changes in these areas; and (f) the *Thinking About My School (TAMS)* (Whitmore, 1974) survey to assess Molly s attitudes and feelings about school.

Informal conversations. Data, in the form of informal conversations with Molly, her parents and her grades two, three and four teachers, in the hallways or over the phone, were also collected. Jot notes were taken during these conversations followed by detailed written descriptions of the conversations which were completed as soon as possible after the events. These data were useful in interpreting the behaviors and activities that occurred within the context of the classroom or at home.

Interviews. Two more informal interviews with Molly and her parents were conducted during the main study. The first interview with the parents took place at the end of the school year (June 2003). The second took place at the beginning of her fourth year of school (grade three), in order to continue the information gathering process on Molly s reading experiences that was started in the pre-study. My goal was to find out whether the parents noticed any changes in Molly s reading habits or experiences, at school or at home. My interview with Molly concentrated on her feelings about the reading process, about reading in two languages, and if her reading interests had changed. These interviews were informal, with no prepared structured questions, so that they could become conversations between two people, where they learn about each other and about the phenomenon under investigation (Weber, 1986). They were experiences that built trust, commitment and developed new or deeper understandings by [offering] a direct access to experience, [and] revealing a complexity of reactions, feelings, and thoughts (Weber, 1986, p. 70). I realized that throughout the interviews it was important to communicate acceptance and genuine interest (Weber, 1986; Ellis, 1998). I also realized that there were special considerations to keep in mind when interviewing Molly.

Ellis (1998) pointed out that those interviewing girls are cautioned to use extra consideration. Since girls have generally already internalized that they should present themselves modestly — as befitting females — the interviewer may need to communicate a great deal of respect, openness and positive expectation for girls like these to feel free to present their achievements, aspirations, and atypical interests or experiences (Ellis, 1998, p. 40). The interviews were transcribed shortly after they took place and the participants reviewed the transcripts and added or deleted any part they were uncomfortable with.

Documents. The collection of different documents was also needed for this study. Art work, letters, written responses, work samples, journal entries, and stories were collected in both languages at various times throughout the years and corroborated and supplemented data from other sources. Yin (1994) suggested that documents could provide specific details to corroborate information from other sources and could provide the basis for inferences that one should use only as clues worthy of further investigation. Documents were dated and examined to show the progress that occurred.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for collecting the information. My aim was to come to a better understanding of what it was that Molly did differently in French and English reading that enabled her to retain her advantage over her non-gifted peers in this area. The quality of this research depended not only on the depth and breadth of the data collected but also on my ability to understand and represent Molly s meaning and experience. Being an effective researcher, according to Merriam (1998), involved being tolerant of ambiguity, being sensitive and intuitive, being a good communicator and possessing the ability to highlight, judge, compare, depict, portray and create for the reader the sense of having been there. These were important attributes I kept in mind while collecting the data.

My role as researcher was that of participant observer in the classroom, in order to gain insights, develop interpersonal relationships and to obtain the child s viewpoint. Borg and Gall (1989), stressed that this method by virtue of [the researcher] being actively involved in the situation being observed, often gains insights and develops interpersonal relationships that are virtually impossible to achieve through any other method (p. 391). Although the level of participation can vary, I functioned primarily as an observer but participated enough to gain rapport with Molly, the teachers and the classes, to develop a better understanding of their functions and relationships. Borg and Gall (1989), pointed out that:

> participant observers must be sensitive not only to what they are including in their protocols, but also what they are excluding. These inclusion-exclusion criteria may change as both the research topic and conceptual framework evolves, as the data begin to emerge as a daily flow of events and activities, as the participant observer develops intuitive

> reactions and hunches, and as the overall picture comes together (p. 394).

Data Analysis

In case study research, the data analysis consists of creating a detailed description of the case and its context. In analyzing my data of Molly, I followed the four procedures outlined by Stake (2000). I began formulating categories by searching for a collection of instances from the data and field notes, and looking for issue-relevant meanings to emerge. I then examined single illustrations in my data and drew meaning from them without looking for multiple illustrations. Stake described this kind of interpretation as a process of pulling the data apart and then putting them back together in more meaningful ways. The next step I embarked upon was to establish patterns and I looked for any correspondence between two or more patterns or categories. Following this, I attempted to present my findings descriptively to facilitate the readers' forming "naturalistic generalizations" (Stake, 2000, p. 240), which are conclusions developed vicariously by the reader because the descriptions have been so well constructed. Therefore, in my data analysis process, the themes that emerged began with the analysis of my initial observations and field notes, they were constantly refined throughout the data collection and analysis process, and they continuously shaped the formation of categories. I concluded my analysis by developing generalizations about Molly's story in terms of patterns and how they compared and contrasted with published literature on gifted students, especially gifted girls.

Ethical Considerations

The guidelines of the University Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants were adhered to in the development of this research project. Consent was obtained from the school, the classroom teachers, the participant and her parents. Informed consent was obtained in writing from the participant and her parents prior to the start of the study and since this study was voluntary, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. The identities of the participants were kept confidential and pseudonyms were used for the participants and the school. The participants were invited to review, amend or delete any part of the transcribed interviews and the drafts of the thesis prior to publication. Ethical consent was also obtained for the pre-study.

Chapter Four

Data Presentation and Discussion — Grade One

For many children beginning school is both exciting and terrifying - terrifying because they are no longer within a secure and comfortable home environment and exciting because many children see school as a world filled with wonders waiting to be discovered. Molly came to kindergarten with the ability to read and an insatiable appetite for learning scientific facts. In the next three chapters, I relate Molly s school experience in the language arts with a specific focus on reading. Starting with some background information from her kindergarten teacher, her time in grade one when I was her teacher, and continuing through to grade four, I elucidate events and conversations and show written work that allows a glimpse into Molly s world at school. Each chapter begins with a description of the physical layout of the classroom and is followed by accounts of some lived experiences in those grades. This chapter starts with a short description of the context of the study and is followed by some background information from her kindergarten teacher, a physical description of her grade one classroom and an account an account of some of my observations while she was my student.

Context of the Study

In order to gain a deeper understanding of this study, a brief description of the context in which it took place is in order. The study took place in a French Immersion elementary school in a small suburban city in northern Alberta - an attractive, vibrant community where 26% of the population were between the ages of 35-49 and an almost equal percentage, 23%, were school age children (Statistics Canada, 2001). The median family income was counted as among the highest in Western Canada at $82,500 and 75% of the city s family income was above $60,000 (Statistics Canada, 2001). Not only was family income high, the educational level of the population 15 years and over was relatively high with almost 6% holding university degrees and over 4% holding other post-secondary certificates. With high incomes and relatively high educational levels, families in this community, in my experience, held high expectations when it came to the education of their children.

The School Division had two French Immersion elementary schools and one junior/senior French Immersion high school that housed a total of approximately 1,300 students. The school Molly attended was relatively new and its newness , as well as its French Immersion program, continued to attract families within and outside its boundaries. The school housed over 400 students from kindergarten to grade six and given the financial difficulties many schools face, Molly s school was fortunate to include among its personnel a counselor/French resource room teacher, an English resource room teacher, a librarian, a music teacher, a gym teacher and a technology facilitator — although none of these positions were full-time positions. Molly started kindergarten at this school in September 2000.

Background to Study: Molly in Kindergarten

After deciding to do a case study with Molly, I perused the contents of her student file and had several informal conversations with her kindergarten teacher in order to obtain some background information concerning Molly s academic and social/emotional growth in her class. For the kindergarten teacher, Molly stood out from the other children in several ways: she could read very well in comparison to the other children in the classroom; she had an imaginary friend to whom she often spoke and of whom she often spoke and her verbal precocity and intense curiosity were clearly evident in the classroom activities. After cognitive and achievement testing was carried out in January 2001, it was determined that Molly qualified for the gifted program in kindergarten. According to the test results in her file, Molly scored in the top percentile for ability on her overall score and showed an extremely high ability in spatial relations. On an achievement test given by the school counselor, Molly scored in the top percentile on letter word identification, passage comprehension and mathematics calculations. The psychologist made two recommendations that were particularly interesting to me. First, although Molly felt most comfortable interacting with adults, the psychologist recommended she be encouraged to interact with people of all ages and warned that adults not relate to her on an adult level as her maturity would suggest but rather as a child. The second recommendation related to her constant desire to please others. The psychologist stressed the need to reinforce for Molly the idea that she does not always have to please everyone. An Individual Program Plan (IPP) was put in place where three short-term objectives were articulated and planned: (a) to expand the breadth of Molly s thinking skills through the use of games that required advanced observational and reasoning abilities; (b) to develop and expand her exceptional potential by using the paired reading approach with a teacher aide; and (c) to focus on phonemic awareness in English and French vocabulary words. After the informal conversations with Molly s kindergarten teacher in 2001, it was concluded that Molly enjoyed her time in kindergarten and demonstrated an early love of learning.

Molly in Grade One

The Classroom

Molly was among the group of grade one students who entered my portable classroom in September of 2001. As they entered, they passed a bookcase full of English books on their left and to their right more English books on a freestanding bookshelf and on built-in shelves. Many of the hardcover and paperback books on the left had colored stickers on them to alert the children that they were organized into genres — there were mathematics books on numbers and shapes, poetry books from Dennis Lee and Enid Blyton, and the social studies section included a number of *Builder Bob* books as well as books on Canada, on careers, and on the historical event at Pompeii. To the right were a large number of science books, mysteries, picture books, alphabet books, easy-read books, magazines, dictionaries and collections of series such as *Captain Underpants* (Pilkey, 1997), *Magic Treehouse* (Osborne, 1996) *Amelia Bedelia* (Parrish, 1985) and the *Littles* (Slater, 2001). There were also five baskets, each containing at least twenty soft cover books that had a colored, numbered sticker on them. The books in these baskets were leveled from 0 to 26 (emergent reader to end grade two level) according to the criterion of the Reading Recovery Program. These bookshelves surrounded a carpet and two large floor pillows and were one of two reading areas in the classroom.

The second reading area was located in the northeast corner of the classroom and once again it had bookshelves full of leveled French books, a colorful foam puzzle carpet with two more large pillows, a listening center with two headsets and an English story cassette and book, as well as a French storybook and cassette. At different times of the year the students could also find a number of read-along books and cassettes for the struggling readers and, depending on the week, one or two bins with center materials in them. The northwest corner of the classroom was set up for small group work with a large table and six small chairs and a pocket chart hanging on the back of the English bookcase filled with word cards ready to be made into sentences. The writing center table, equipped with various types of papers and pre-made booklets, felt pens, crayons, rulers and other necessary writing items that students could use to practice different kinds of writing, was tucked in the corner. A whiteboard with permanent black lines drawn on it was on the wall beside the table so the students could practice penmanship. Beside the writing center were two computers where the children could play numerous French language arts and math games to reinforce their newly acquired vocabulary and practice their number skills. Two long tables with at least four chairs around each one stood on the south side of the classroom and were regularly used for small group activities.

Although portable classrooms are often stuffy and dreary, I tried to make the classroom bright and cheery. The tan-colored walls were covered with many pictures, words and posters, alphabet letters, each space having large black letters above it, indicating its subject area. There were also several empty spaces on brightly covered bulletin boards waiting to be filled by students work. A bright pink topper hung over the sole window, plants were lined up under the window on the French bookshelf and the hum of the fish tank s aeration system could be heard during rare moments of silence. New soft fluorescent lighting had been installed in all the classrooms the previous year and over the summer the ragged and stained carpets in the portables were removed and replaced by speckled white linoleum. The classroom environment was one that I had set up for productive noise and movement and provided for exploration, stimulation and challenge — elements crucial to the child s acquisition of new information, their ability to test out ideas and experiences and a place where they create new knowledge (Belgrad, 1998; Clark, 1997; Shaklee, 1998; Vydra & Leimbach, 1998). Molly stepped into this physically and psychologically safe environment that September morning full of excitement, cheer, and curiosity.

Coincidentally, during the first four months of Molly s grade one year in my class, I was attempting to choose a dissertation topic. Comments Molly made in class, behaviors she would exhibit, and work samples she handed in raised questions for me. These incidents were memorable and thought provoking and piqued my interest enough that I decided to do a case study on this gifted child.

Getting Acquainted

Molly loved to talk. She had long blonde hair, blue eyes, was of average height for her age, slightly pigeon-toed, normally of good-cheer and she seemed to bounce everywhere she went. She often came to the front of my desk, pigtails or ponytail bobbing, to ask a question or recount a fact or event. I remember her telling me one day that her mother had blood type A and that she could not eat smoked salmon or shrimp which she found a real shame because they were her favorite foods. Although I did not know the relation between blood type and the inability to eat certain foods, I remember thinking — does she see a relation between the two? I never asked her, but I wondered how many children would care about, let alone know the blood type of a member of their family? Another time she came to my desk and proudly showed me her newly pierced ears saying, and tomorrow I m getting karat earrings (FN, November, 2001). She explained that she needed karat earrings so that her ears would not get infected. The intriguing comments above seemed to me to be examples of Molly s ability to draw associations between diverse ideas - a characteristic commonly exhibited by gifted children (Kerr, 1994; Tuttle, Becker & Sousa, 1988). Molly did not use the word karat in the correct manner and it was not evident that she knew the word, but comprehension of the concept was evident. In addition to the interesting comments made in class, there were the following behaviors she exhibited that I thought unusual for a child her age. The first occurred during silent reading time.

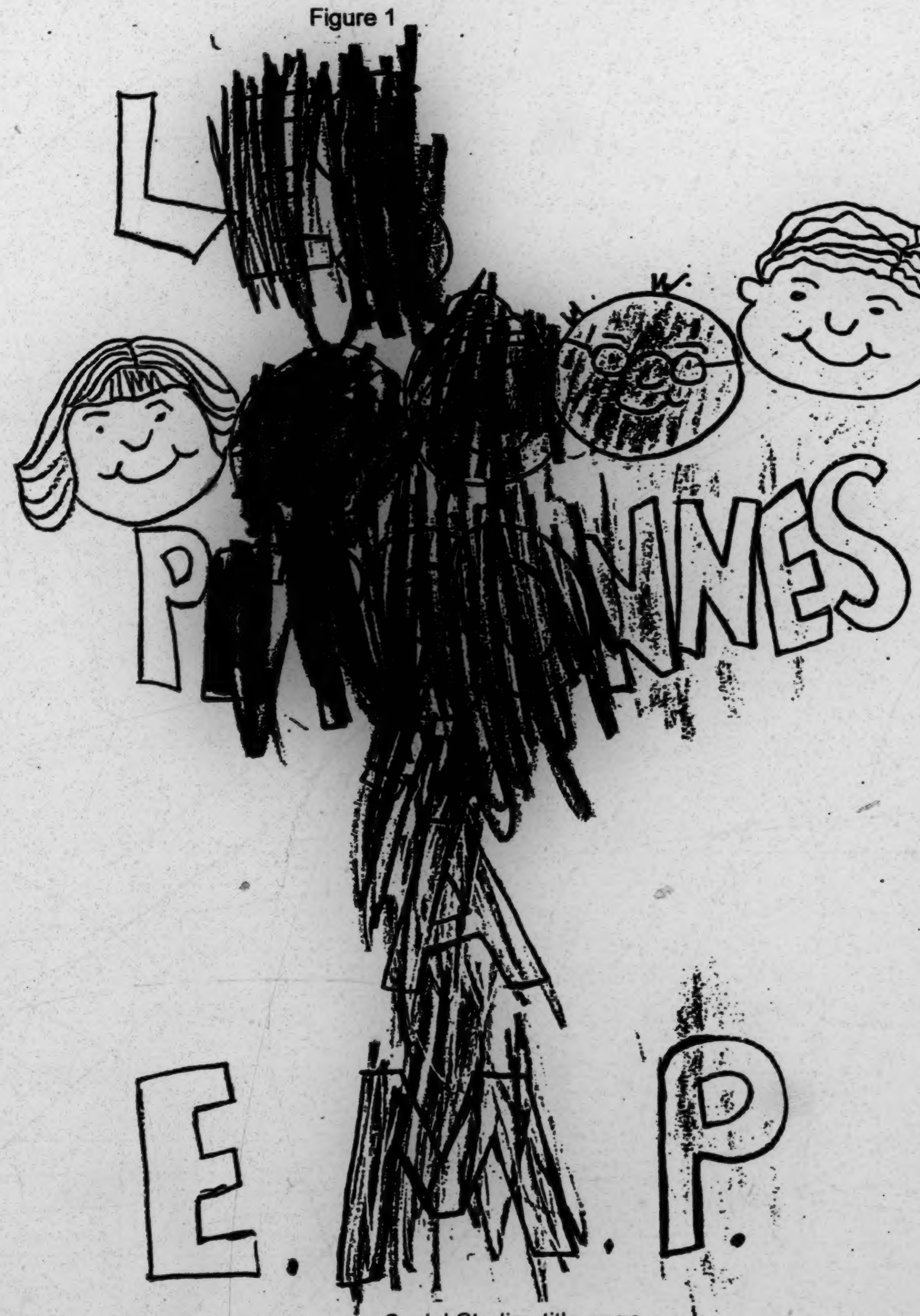
After the noon hour recess and a short music program over the intercom, the students started their afternoon with about 15 minutes of silent reading. It wasn t really silent, the children were allowed to go anywhere in the classroom with their book or magazine, with a partner or alone and using a quiet voice — read . The room was a steady hum of whispering voices and movement as students exchanged and searched for new books. Groups of two or three children could be seen laying on one of the carpets poring over and discussing the pictures of a magazine or science book, while members of another group would be taking turns reading a story aloud to one another. Some children preferred to read alone at their desks while some advanced students took pleasure in reading books to those who were still discovering the magic of print on the pages. There were always two students listening to a story tape at the listening center and there were a few who managed to spend the 15 minutes searching for a book but never finding one they wanted to read. Molly never had a problem finding something to read. It quickly became evident to me and to the other students that Molly knew a lot of facts, especially about animals, and that she could read the grade two and three level books that were found in the classroom library. According to the literature, the voracious reading habit and unusual retentiveness displayed by Molly are additional characteristics attributed to gifted children (Porter, 1999; Smutny, 1998a; Tuttle, Becker & Sousa, 1988).

Molly was a part of a small group of strong readers but her open curiosity and her obvious eagerness to learn, set her apart from this group as well as from her other classmates. It was during silent reading time that her inquisitiveness about living things and her willingness to share what she knew and what she was reading attracted small crowds around her desk. For a couple of weeks in early November there were often four or five students gathered around Molly s desk, asking questions about what she was reading, asking if a particular book was a good one to read, asking her to read out loud to them (which she did on occasion) or coming to ask her to read a word that they could not decipher nor understand. At first she seemed to enjoy the role of reader - she would sometimes read to students or help them with unfamiliar words - and she seemed to enjoy the role of resident expert - when students came to her with questions relating to animals or other scientific matters. She seemed to like the attention. Molly was very obliging to all their requests but that resulted in a steady stream of students coming and asking for help in reading. After a few weeks, tears and minor temper tantrums due to frustration began surfacing in Molly. A student alerted me to the first of these episodes by coming to my desk and informing me that Molly was crying. He seemed utterly perplexed, as did the other students around her desk. I found her sitting, arms crossed and head down, tears streaming down her face — a face that had a scowl on it that communicated volumes. She would not, however, share what was bothering her and just insisted she be left alone. I acquiesced but kept an eye out for other incidences. They were quickly forthcoming.

Minor disagreements such as another student cutting in front of her in the line-up, resulted in tears and the declaration It s not fair! There were disagreements on the playground about rules of a made-up game, and disagreements erupted during group work when Molly s suggestions were not carried out. Molly s last tearful episode during silent reading time in grade one, was interjected with loud commands of Go away! to anyone who approached her desk. I took Molly aside in order to find out the cause of her frustration and after a bit of probing she admitted that the constant demands of her classmates that she read to them or decipher words for them or help them, was upsetting her. She said she just wanted to be left alone so she could read by herself. They should learn to do things by themselves! was her reasoning (FN November, 2001). I remember thinking that the children and I took for granted that she would not mind being the teacher but these incidents and my preliminary readings in the area of giftedness, reminded me that even the brightest child had special social and emotional needs that needed to be respected (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990; Friedman & Shore, 2000; Gallagher, 1985; Kerr, 1994; Klein & Tannenbaum, 1992; Millard, 1997; Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990; Porter, 1999; Silverman, 1986; Smutny, 1998b). Gifted children often experience adjustment problems in school because of uneven social, emotional and intellectual development (Knopper, 1998). Molly s body and emotions were age appropriate but her cognitive abilities were several years ahead of her peers. The displays of frustration and temper tantrums I witnessed in the classroom were likely a result of this asynchronous development. It has also been suggested, however, that the boredom and disappointment that some gifted children experience in the school setting is because their enthusiasm, excitement and expectations are not being met (Kerr, 1991). A common result of this phenomenon is personal frustration and arguments with classmates.

One of the last incidents I remember vividly, before I began to observe Molly more closely as the focus of my research, was when she handed in a title page in social studies (Figure 1). The title (in French) was Members of My Family and there were facial drawings of parents, children, and grandparents amidst the larger two-dimensional letters. She proudly came to my desk and showed me that she had finished coloring her title page. There was one large column of black wax crayon scribbled from left to right down the middle of the page. She had obviously pressed hard on the crayon as the lines were dark and thick, almost obliterating the letters and faces beneath them. My first thought was — is she angry at something or with someone? I had not expected this kind of work from her. I had expected her printing and coloring to be as advanced as her intellectual abilities. Students who took so little time or care in coloring a picture were normally those who had problems with fine motor skills or those who lacked interest in coloring. I was curious as to why she colored the page in that fashion and asked her. She just shrugged her shoulders, not the least bit embarrassed or perturbed and said that was the way she could color the most in the least amount of time and black was her favorite color. What could I say? She definitely had her own reasons for doing what she did and did not feel that there was anything unusual about her methods or reasoning. Incidents such as

Figure 1



Social Studies title page.

these and the wonderings and sense of amazement that I felt during some of our encounters were typical of this grade one period of time. Subsequent readings in this area enlightened me to the fact that poor handwriting is not unusual in gifted children and that some highly gifted children show signs of a writing disability (Smutny, Walker & Meckstroth, 1997; Winner, 1996). This coloring episode could also have been an indication that she was either bored with the goal of being neat or she was not yet aware that it was an expectation (Winner, 1996).

I shared many of these incidences with her mother when she came to pick Molly up after school and she in turn shared her stories of wonder about her child. Her favorite story was the time when two-year-old Molly pointed to and read the word baby in a newspaper ad where the mother insisted there was no picture of a baby to prompt her. She said the same thing happened with the word donut . According to her mother, Molly again read the word in a newspaper ad that had no picture prompts. The mother remembered these incidents because she found them unusual when she compared them to other children s developments of the same age. It did not take her long to realize that Molly was different from the other children and the most striking difference was in the level of her verbal and comprehension capabilities. She had kept mental notes of the unusual social, emotional and developmental events during Molly s childhood and was pleased to share some of them with me during our informal conversations at the end of the school day. Although the literature on identifying the precursors of giftedness in young children is incomplete and inconclusive, there are specific infant behaviors that have been correlated with later measures of intelligence (Abroms, 1982; Brown, 1970; Gelbrich, 1998). Infants who exhibit an unusual ability to control and interact with their environment, those who show early fine motor control, those who are generally awake more and responsive to external stimuli, and those who exhibit early oral language capabilities, have been identified as gifted in early childhood (Gelbrich, 1998). According to her mother, Molly exhibited all these behaviors to various degrees.

It was near the end of November, during parent-teacher interviews, that Molly s mother suggested I use Molly as a candidate for my case study. I thought about her suggestion and became excited at the prospect. After discussing the possibility of doing a case study of a gifted elementary girl with a few professors, it was Dr. Clandinin s encouragement and shared excitement that became the impetus for this journey. A preliminary plan was set in place to collect written work, to conduct interviews and to record time spent with Molly during recesses, reading or engaging in other school related activities. Ethical consent was obtained for the pre-study, which began in 2002, and for the main study, which began in May 2003 and continued until June 2004. It wasn t until early 2002, therefore, that Molly became the focus for my research and it was at this time that I began to record some of my observations.

Staying in for Recess

The New Year brought fresh challenges as I juggled the role of teacher and observer. In order to interact one-on-one with Molly and gather data on a regular basis without showing preferential treatment or creating feelings of inadequacy in students, I devised a plan that I believed would meet everyone s needs. I knew that some of the children in class had troubled home lives and that they sometimes came to school feeling worried and disinterested in learning. Sometimes children would ask to stay in at recess so they could read by themselves or just talk. I wanted to give these children the opportunity to be able to stay in and either talk with someone or engage in an activity that they found helpful in dealing with their feelings. So I started a system whereby children could write their name on a calendar if they wanted to stay in for a particular recess — only one person per recess. I explained that I would stay in for these recesses and they could read, do some work or help me in the classroom. There were certain days and recesses that were open and for the first few weeks quite a few children filled in their names to stay in. For some, it was the only recess they spent indoors — I knew that they did not really need to stay in, that they did not feel alone or defeated. There were about two students who stayed in every once in a while — when they were having a bad day . For most others, it was a novelty that soon wore off, except for Molly. I realized that Molly s home lives were fine and I speculated about the reasons she was staying in regularly for recess. Was she was just trying to please me? Did she like the fact that it was a one-on-one situation — no one else was around? Or was it because she related well to adults and found their company more stimulating than that of her peers? Most likely it was a combination of all of the above factors.

Molly stayed in for recess at least twice a month during the latter half of grade one. There are many stories to tell — not only of her time in grade one but in subsequent grades as well. Therefore, in order to provide a comprehensive and sequential sketch of my observations of Molly s time in grades one, two and part of grade three, I will present my observations month by month.

January. On that first January afternoon, I explained to Molly that I was interested in understanding how she learned and that I needed to tape-record the sessions because it was too difficult to remember everything that was being said. She was quite happy with the interest I was showing and seemed to feel quite important. She smiled broadly whenever I questioned her, praised her, or asked her to clarify a point or a question for me. Each time I asked her to come to the office or to the library with me she would walk proudly, head up, back straight, bouncing merrily beside me until we got to our destination. Other children would sometimes ask what she was doing, as they gazed at us both, and she would nonchalantly answer, Oh, just reading a story, or We re going to do a craft together! or once, Madame wants to find out how I learn. She felt special being the subject of my study and continued to feel this way throughout our three years together. She was also proud that I was recording our conversations and would sometimes gaze at the recorder while talking. At times, she would speak with intense animation, wave her arms around, move in her chair and stare at the recorder. It seemed as if she wanted her actions as well as her words to be recorded. After the first few sessions, I was able to forget that the tape recorder was on. Molly, however, was obviously keeping an eye on it because on a few occasions she alerted me to the fact that the tape had run out!

Normally Molly was ready for our get-togethers even before the other children had gone outside for recess - she would have her books picked out from the shelves on the north side of the room and be anxiously waiting by a table, or she would prepare the materials for a craft she wanted us to do together. We usually sat at the small, long table situated at the back of the classroom when we read stories or played a game. If we were engaged in a more elaborate activity, like a craft, where we needed more room, we would sit at the large square, white table on the west side of the class. Neither table was far from her favorite part of the class library — the science section. We always sat side by side, never across from one another — that seating arrangement was solely for testing purposes, a practice we followed twice a year.

During those first sessions in January, she read a story to me and although I offered to take turns reading the story she chose, she would have nothing of it. Never once in our times together did she want or allow me to read to her. I sometimes found it difficult to follow her reading as she had a tendency to read quickly, ignore punctuation and she lisped. I also don t remember a time that Molly read a book to me without stopping to interject with a question or a personal story that somehow related to what she was reading. In this first session I asked her questions connected to the reading process - did she remember the first book she read? How did she know a book was hard to read? How did she learn to read? Her answers were intriguing.

The first book she remembers reading was a book she called Loony Bear Book about the months of the year, days of the week, seasons, clothing and various other general knowledge type sections. She said she read this book when she was two years old and living in Selkirk, Manitoba. She talked fondly of the book, it was a really cool book. But then mentioned that, [when] I was two I woke up one night at Selkirk and I just ripped it and torned it and ripped it and torned it. I don t know [why]. My baby sister ripped it and torned it a few times too. (RR Jan 9/02). Molly pointed out that her younger stepsister was going through the terrible twos at the time, a phase she was sure she never went through. It was amusing to note how adamant she was about certain events in her life and I also found it surprising that a young student would display such a strong will and such self-confidence. Winner (1996) aptly describes the independence of thought and values of the gifted and, as I see it, of Molly:

> No matter what the domain of gift, children with high ability typically are independent, self-directed, willful, dominant nonconformists . These children are not passive goody-goodies. They are often difficult to be around because they want to run the show . Yet this same quality also makes them most interesting and stimulating to be around. (p. 217)

Molly was definitely an independent spirit, a self-directed learner who loved to run the show . She ran the show during our sessions together, during group work and during morning sharing time. During morning sharing time the class had agreed that those who chose could share one idea or personal event with the others so that everyone would have a chance to share during the time allocated for this activity. I found it irritating that Molly regularly shared two or three personal events and I grew reluctant to call upon her. She would speak so fast that it was hard to interrupt! Although I spoke with her about the need to share the time and follow the established rules set down by her classmates, her behavior did not change throughout the year. It was apparent she already exhibited signs of what Winner (1996) called a dominant nonconformist (p. 217). Perhaps the conversation and questions during this activity were at a lower level than what Molly was operating from and out of frustration she dominated the conversation (Tuttle, Becker & Sousa, 1988). Her behavior could also be recognized as a characteristic attributable to gifted leadership — that is, the tendency to influence others when they are around and to direct the activity in which they are involved (Abroms, 1985; Gardner, 2000). However, gifted leadership is a complex and controversial area in the research literature on giftedness. Intellectual giftedness is not tantamount to leadership giftedness and any relationship between the two is inconclusive (Abroms, 1985). Although Molly seemed to possess some of the personality characteristics associated with the leadership profile, such as enthusiasm, easy communications skills, humor and a degree of intelligence, the development of leadership is one challenge that modern education offers all pupils, not merely those who are gifted (Abroms, 1985). Another challenge that elementary educators face is dealing with the different reading ability levels in their classrooms.

As far as Molly was concerned, the degree of difficulty of a book depended upon the number of words on each page. She sometimes counted the words before she began reading a book and would mention that it was sort of easy because there were so few words in it. Often, it was true. The book was too easy for her, but it was the subject that had intrigued her — it was about animals.

Molly did not have to think long on the question of how she learned to read. She cocked her head, looked up to the ceiling and recounted how her dad kept on reading to me since I was borned to (sic) the more longer words he reads to me the more my brain listens too, so then I can read the long words (RR Jan 14/02). I noted that when she read science books, she would look at the pictures and skim or read the captions to begin with and later go back and read the main text. Amid the interjections of stories, questions and the sharing of other related facts she would, every once in a while, stop and look at me with sparkling eyes and a big smile and announce, I love this stuff! (RR Jan 14/02). This sentiment was apparent not only in her demeanor but also in the way she spoke of the different animals and reptiles that intrigued her. She would inform me that she was partial to certain words — tadpole and frog, for instance, because, I m an animal person , and that she loved reptiles because, It s just my habit (RR Jan 9/02). I watched her as she signed up for the next session and could tell by the loud sighs that she was not happy about having to wait so long. She always followed the rules however, and so she did not complain.

The second session in January took place only five days after the first. I wondered how many times she would have signed up had the open recesses not been booked by others. We had an interesting conversation during the latter half of this session concerning mummies and the afterlife. I raised this topic deliberately during this session because of an informal conversation we had had a few days earlier. Since I had not taped this earlier conversation, I brought it up again in order to document and explore her knowledge in this area. In the aforementioned conversation we talked about famous Egyptian kings and I told her about the interesting artifacts I had seen during an exhibit of King Tutankhamen years earlier. As I spoke I noticed she was looking at me with a very serious expression and was waiting patiently for me to finish what I had to say. When I finished speaking, she solemnly asked if I knew that there was another King more famous than King Tutankhamen? I asked who and she began to tell me about King Rameses. Molly was happy to share details such as how they pulled the inner organs out of different orifices such as the nose and mouth with hooks and how they poured special salt on the body before they wrapped it tightly in cloth:

> Me: You remember when we talked about King Tutankhamen, the king of Egypt?
>
> Molly: Ummhmm. He only died at 18.
>
> Me: Yes. I had a book on him because I went to see a lot of his artifacts and all his jewels and stuff like that and I was going to bring it for you to look at but I forgot it today.
>
> Molly: Well, almost everybody says there s a more famouser (sic) one. King Rameses.
>
> Me: Why is he so famous I wonder?
>
> Molly: Well, you never know. After I should bring a special book to school then you ll find out.
>
> Me: Is that right? Did you already read this special book? So you know?

Molly: He still has . ([Under her breath] . come on . come on .) He still has hair on his head, skin on face and hands. He still has teeth in his mouth.

Me: And he s dead?

Molly: Well, that happened because he was made into a mummy. And there s a special salt called nitro .

Me: A special salt called nitro .

Molly: They had to put pepper in his nose to keep it s shape!

Me: (laughter) Yea?

Molly: They took out his brains. Out of his nostril with a hook and thrown it away cause Egyptians believe the heart, not the brain did the thinking.

Me: Really? What do you think?

Molly: I think the brain does the thinking and it sends it to the heart or the senses. The heart sends it to the brain.

Me: So they work together?

Molly: They took out the liver, the lungs, the stomach and the investines(sic) ..They wrapped each one into cloth and put it in a, in a .jar and they would be buried with the King.

Me: I see.

Molly: They put some mud and some ummm,(to herself) I forget, I forget, I forget. They put some mud and some stuff — whatever it s called — into his body to keep, to keep it round.

Me: Oh, that s interesting. (RR Jan 14/02)

This conversation reveals a couple of intriguing points. First, I find it interesting to note that, from the beginning, Molly was in control of our sessions. She desperately wanted to share what she knew with me and it was rare that I would finish a question or statement — it really did not matter to her what I thought of the matter under discussion.

The second point of interest is that she often (as will be seen in subsequent dialogues) talked to herself when she was trying to remember something or when she was trying to explain an abstract concept. It almost seemed as if she was prompting herself, as if talking out loud would help her remember or clarify what she wanted to say. It was becoming evident to me that some of Molly s knowledge was straight recall from whatever book she had recently read I wondered if talking out loud was a strategy she used to replay the text in her head in an effort to remember what came next. Her strategy reminded me of those students who struggle to remember the order of certain letters of the alphabet and the only way they can figure out the sequence is by reciting the alphabet from the beginning. Very young children use audible language to guide (or regulate) their actions and/or thinking (Adams, 1994). Vygotsky (1962) suggests this regulatory speech is gradually internalized as inner speech. However, if a child finds a task difficult, he or she can return to a level of processing where thinking aloud (audible regulatory speech) helps them through the task (Adams, 1994). Many adults do much the same when they are studying, for instance, or when they are trying to remember a word or event.

Molly had a story to tell and seeing that she had caught my interest she continued to inform me that Egyptians believed in the afterlife and that s where they went after they died:

> Molly: When the King died then he would be sent to a place called Afterworld.
>
> Me: Where s that?
>
> Molly: Umm. It s out of the world. And it s in another type of world. I don t know what it s . I don t know where it is but it s suppose (sic) to be very special. (RR Jan 14/02)

When I asked where she had learned this information she explained that she read it in a book at home and offered to bring it in to show me. I told her that I was impressed with her knowledge in this area and wanted to see the book. She brought it in a few weeks later —*Mummies* (Milton, 1996) - and read it to me over one lunch hour recess, barely finishing (she continued reading even after the bell rang and children were filing in). Unfortunately, this particular session was the only one in three years of taping, where I had forgotten to press RECORD. However, it was interesting to note that what she had recounted to me in our initial conversation, on the process of mummification, was almost verbatim from the book. *Mummies* is from the All Aboard Reading Series , level 2 (for grades 1-3) and it explains the Egyptian pharaohs beliefs about life after death, the process of mummification and depicts the pyramids as burial places. During this reading, Molly mentioned that she thought only the Egyptians went to the afterworld, which this time, she believed, was underground. Humans got to go to heaven, which was up in the sky (FN Jan 31/02).

February. The books she read to me in our February session continued to give me the opportunity to observe her reading habits and learn more about how she viewed family, friends and herself. February was a short month made even shorter with days off for Teachers Convention, Family Day, several recesses occupied with meetings I needed to attend, and so the opportunities to stay in for recess were few. Subsequently, Molly stayed in for only one recess in February and read *The Great Animal Search* (Young, 1994) to me. These books are based on the same principle as the popular *Where s Waldo?* Series (Handford, 1997), where the reader needs to find certain pictures on a page filled with theme-based images. I noted that when she read she would use her voice and her body to convey meaning and to create mood:

> Molly: I would be upset. Cause animals, animals, animals! That s the only thing I think about! [waves her arms, her voice rising each time she says animal] And you know what? Yesterday I watched Crocodile Hunter and oouuh yea, he s saw some really cool things! [excited voice, eyes sparkling, bouncing in chair]. Except they re just mammals.
>
> Me: Is that right?
>
> Molly: Yea!
>
> Me: He s a funny guy.

> Molly: Yea, Crocodile Hunter. And all these kids they saw him and I think they liked his show so they went [makes this funny cackling type noise]. That show is pretty silly sometimes.
>
> Me: Sometimes it is. But he makes you laugh. I like people who make me laugh.
>
> Molly: Yea. [Continues reading from book] The poison from a king cobra s bite can kill a person in half an hour. Spot one. Hi there! [Giggles when she finds it] That was real easy! Turn the page. [with a kind of eerie voice reading] Magical World Now . can you guess how strange looking Hammerhead Sharks got their name? Spot one. Because their head is like a hammer. (RR Feb 26/02)

I found Molly s apparent comprehension of certain topics beguiling because it made me wonder if she actually understood what she was talking about or whether it was strictly a regurgitation of information and therefore a superficial understanding of the topic. My curiosity compelled me to listen carefully and ask questions. The young age at which she was demonstrating adult like intellectual skills suggested a rapid early unfolding of these skills, skills such as: learning quickly, reasoning with advanced logic, showing advanced verbal reasoning; and generalizing more readily than her peers (Friedman & Shore, 2000). Molly, like many gifted children, had an excellent memory and had the ability to grasp ideas and reach conclusions rapidly, which undoubtedly accounted for her unusual knowledge base (Freeman, 1985). It could be that, as Friedman and Shore (2000) stated, these children might lack only specific educational, interpersonal, or more general cultural experiences and the opportunity to interconnect these in their memory, in order to more fully close the gap with adult expertise (p. 183). This is where the home, the school and the community could work together to make sure gifted students have opportunities to engage in meaningful, creative, problem solving, concept forming experiences (Friedman & Shore, 2000; Freeman, 1985).

Molly s strong sense of curiosity and her ability to see complex relationships between what she read and what she saw on television (for example), were two gifted characteristics that I frequently observed (Porter, 1999). Although I found this advanced use of metacognitive skills interesting, it set her apart from most of her classmates. Molly s seeming ability to see relationships between things that her peers could not, may possibly explain why she chose to stay in for so many recesses and why she enjoyed talking to adults.

Also of interest to me was her role as a performer and storyteller — the two being inextricably intertwined. According to Freeman (1985), many academically gifted children are capable of quick and easy mechanical reading and therefore sometimes miss out on meaning and expression. This was not true for Molly, for no matter what she read orally, some degree of animation and/or histrionics would accompany the reading. I found that although her oral version of the text would contain miscues, they rarely affected meaning. It seemed as if she were making the text her own through the reading. It reminded me of what the authors of *Women s Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) said when describing how women come to a way of knowing and thinking when they find their voice - a mechanical performance will be replaced with authentic understanding when what is learned becomes a part of who they are. There was also the possibility that since I was always her willing audience, her performance was for my benefit. I wondered if she felt she needed to please me, to impress me, or did she just want to share? According to Taylor (1996), literature dramatizes active dialogue and teachers should invite students to participate in that dialogue. Students should be invited to enter the limited dramatic world the work enacts, to be part of that experience [because] readers learn by experiencing, encountering the text .to be told about the experience is no substitute for the experience itself. Literature allows [one to] imaginatively make [their] own discoveries (p. 81). Perhaps this is what Molly was doing when she read out loud.

A little later in the session she read *Things That are the Most in the World* (Barrett, 1984), which highlighted her sense of humor. She got all the jokes and laughed all the way through the reading. Although I did not always understand her sense of humor, she did get me to laugh (albeit silently) a few times:

> Molly: The silliest thing in the world is a chicken in a frog costume. That s not right! [Giggle]. The quietest thing in the world is a worm chewing peanut butter! This is a funny book! The prickliest thing in the world is the inside of a pushicun (sic).
>
> Me: A which? (I tried not to laugh)
>
> Molly: A pushicun (sic)!

Me: A pushicun? Try to look at that word again. That s a compound word.

Molly: Pincushion.

Me: Pincushion. There you go!

Molly: The hottest thing in the world is a fire-breathing dragon eating a pepperoni pizza! [giggle]. But uh but the really the hottest thing in the world is a fire breathing dragon except dragons aren t real! That [inaudible] is true. The hardest thing in the world is a (sic) ant windsurfing in a bowl of pea soup! And this is real funny the teeniest, weeniest [voice changes and becomes squeaky] thing in the world is a newborn flea! [Tried not to laugh at her facial expression]

Me: Aw. That s cute.

Molly: Yeah. Okay. (reading) The longest thing in the world is what you have .what you d have if you d tied every single strand of spaghetti together end to end. This is a real funny book. The jumpiest thing in the world is two thousand two hundred twenty two toads on a trampoline. Well, that s not the jumpiest thing twenty-two frogs! Ahh, okay [giggle] this one is real funny. The most smelliest the smelliest thing in the world is a skunk competition.

Me: Competition ? [Again, I wanted to laugh]

Molly: (repeats) competition.

Me: Convention.

I recognized that Molly had a well-developed, keen sense of humor and that she saw humor in situations that I did not. Many gifted children have an early appreciation of humor that is a result of their advanced cognitive and language abilities (Porter, 1999). Porter also stated that the gifted students who have advanced cognitive and language skills know what is typical in situations and therefore see the exceptions or incongruities as funny. Molly certainly seemed to enjoy the incongruities in the book she was reading. According to Clark (1992) however, a keen sense of humor in the gifted can be gentle or hostile and concomitant problems are possible. She stated that unless gifted children learned how their behaviors affected the feelings and behaviors of others the possibility existed that they would use humor for critical attacks upon others thereby damaging friendships and other close relationships. As far as I was aware, this had not happened to date.

In addition to confirming her sense of humor, this session also demonstrated that Molly did not become embarrassed when she mispronounced words. She would simply repeat the correct pronunciation when given, as was evidenced in the above dialogue and in the following three examples:

> Molly: (reading) Siamese cats have very impressive and sometimes loud voices with different meows for hungry, anger or .what s this word?(to herself) Cont i..ment. Contiment.
>
> Me: Contentment.
>
> Molly: Contentment. It s kind of big as a pet. [looking at a page with pigs].

Molly: Yea. Sidewinders [pronounced with a short i sound] slither along with an s-shaped wiggle. Find four sidewinders (sic) now.

Me: Sidewinders [saying it with the long I].

Molly: Sidewinders. One, two, three, four how many?

Molly: And there s also stinks .are hard to spot in desert sand. Find four.

Me: What are hard to spot? [Found it very hard not to laugh]

Molly: Stinks.

Me: Stinks or skinks?

Molly: Skinks. Some have blue tongues. (RR Feb 26/02)

I found her mispronunciations and the fact that she would simply repeat the word correctly after me and go merrily on with the text, amusing. Since I did not want to embarrass her by laughing out loud, I had to keep a straight face, which I often found difficult. Although I had never made an issue of her mispronunciations, I wondered if she had ever noticed my amusement. If she had, she never seemed embarrassed. It seems that as children progress in the reading process — usually towards the end of grade one or beginning of grade two — some children suddenly invest an inordinate amount of effort into decoding (Adams, 1994). They begin reading form for from and there for three , despite obvious contextual clues; they sometimes stare at difficult words without responding; and their misreadings, while graphically related to the word in the text may be totally inappropriate in context (Adams, 1994). These tendencies occur at different levels and persist for different periods of time for different children. However, according to Adams (1994), they reflect a necessary and highly functional phase in the realization of a complex skill such as reading. He goes on to explain that

> ...[t]he only way for the visual system to learn about the spellings of words is by devoting attention to them. As the spellings of more and more words are internalized, decoding will become more and more automatic, and only when it becomes automatic can it properly work in concert rather than in competition with contextual processing (Adams, 1994, p. 850).

Although Adams refers to the general population of beginning readers, it does not seem inconceivable that Molly would also pass through such a phase, especially given the emphasis on spelling and writing in school at these grade levels.

Molly was not embarrassed over her mispronunciations, nor was she embarrassed to share the reason she got a bloody nose at a noon hour recess:

> Me: Did you have a bleeding nose yesterday? [Nods yes] What happened? [Thinking it was a play accident]
>
> Molly: Well, sometimes I get dry boogers in my nose and they re hard to blow em out so sometimes I have to pick them out and sometimes I get a little cut in my nose.
>
> Me: Oh, so that s what happened. [Highly amused but tried not to show it]

Molly: Ummhmm. It was only a little one! And it was a big one. That s weird. (RR Feb 26/02)

Molly was very precise and detailed in her description of why she had a bleeding nose — it was her scientific version of the event. I realized that Molly always took learning very seriously. As was the practice when we read together, Molly would interrupt the reading with various (sometimes) related stories. She often spoke about her families. In this session the digression was about her youngest stepsister:

Molly: You know my baby sister Debbie when you saw her?

Me: Ummhmm.

Molly: She s starting to be a terrible two now.

Me: (surprised and amused voice) Is she? (I laughed)

Molly: And she s already one! Know what she s doing?

Me: No.

Molly: We have to put a little chair now, because now she s starting to be real messy with her food. And one throwed(sic) the food right there (points to the ground). She goes to the blue chair almost everyday!

Me: Yea? And the blue chair? What s that?

Molly: The blue chair is the time out for eating.

Me: Oh.

Molly: One throw of food or one mess. Right there. And she does it almost everyday!

Me: Oh my goodness! So the terrible twos are starting. Did you ever go through the terrible twos do you think?

Molly: Umm. Pardon me?

Me: Did you ever go through the terrible twos?

Molly: No way! (RR Feb 26/02)

She continued to speak of her younger stepsisters and how she feels very responsible and grown up because her youngest stepsister calls for her rather than her mother when she wakes up from a nap and doesn t seem nearly as grumpy as is otherwise the case. I realized Molly was playing the grownup here and wondered if she had ever really been a child. She felt that her youngest stepsister was funny even for a little kid (RR Feb 26/02). I sometimes wondered if she saw herself as a child.

I discovered early in our time together that there were certain things Molly liked to talk about and other things she would stubbornly refuse to discuss. It was evident that Molly loved to talk about animals, reptiles in particular. However, she was reluctant to continue conversations on topics that she was not interested in, topics that upset her, or any reference to her shortcomings or perceived weaknesses. For example, I had noted that Molly had been upset with one of her girlfriends and during our session in February asked her why:

Me: I also had a question about yesterday when Brenda presented her Student-of-the-Week poster?

Molly: Yea?

Me: I think you were a little bit upset that she didn t write your name down

Molly: Yea. Because Brenda likes me a lot! I think she s the kid that likes me the most!

Me: And so why were you upset?

Molly: Because she likes me a lot and she didn t write down my name and there was enough room!

Me: And I can t remember what part of the poster she had written down her best friends or something?

Molly: Yea, it was Hazel and Shayleen.

Me: Oh.

Molly: But she didn t write down my name even though there was room!

Me: And what did she say when you asked her?

Molly: She said — there wasn t enough room. And I know there was enough room!

Me: Hmmmm.

Molly: Look at this. That s the female and that s the male. Do they look alike? (RR Feb 26/02)

It was apparent that Molly had evaluated the situation between herself and Brenda and had come to the conclusion that the argument Brenda was presenting did not support what she knew to be true. She realized Brenda had lied but rather than delving deeper into the troubling event to find out why her friend lied, she continues reading, effectively ending the conversation.

According to Baska (1989), gifted children demonstrate a strong sense of justice and fair play in their relationships. However, it seems that Molly s need for justice and fair play were thwarted in this incident. Molly s reaction to this incident could also be a result of the uneven development in social and cognitive skills that many gifted children experience. This asynchronous development causes unique adjustment problems in school that often result in temper tantrums, depression and aggressive behavior (Knopper, 1998). The difference in levels of cognitive functioning but not of emotional functioning, between the two girls, impeded their ability to deal effectively with the problem. It has been well documented that children like Molly need opportunities to interact with mental as well as chronological peers but finding friends with similar interests and intellectual abilities is often difficult in traditional school settings (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Kerr, 1994; Knopper, 1998; Veenker & Veenker, 1998). According to Coleman and Cross (2001), gifted children experience more conflict because their advanced development places them more frequently at odds with social conventions.

Conflicts with peers were but one problem Molly faced as she strove to find her place within the school setting. A negative self-image would also prove to be of concern, the beginnings of which can be seen in the following example. In the same conversation as above, when talking about how the male of the species is often bigger than the female of the same species she mentioned that she thought she was the littlest in the class :

Me: Do you like being the littlest in the class?

Molly: A little. But it s pretty hard being the littlest kid in the class.

Me: How is it hard?

Molly: Well, big . Those big kids can reach fings [sic] that I can t reach. And I like to do things all by myself. And especially at home. Oh, there s a lot of things I have to climb on the kitchen, go up the drawers

Me: Yea?

Molly: Real hard. And let s get back to the book. (RR Feb 26/02)

Sometimes it wasn t easy to illicit information from Molly — she didn t seem comfortable talking about her feelings on certain subjects or perhaps she just didn t think it was important.

March. Although March was a short month — a professional development day and a week of spring holidays reduced the number of recesses that were open - Molly stayed in for two recesses. One session could not be transcribed due to an inordinate amount of background noise (It had been inside recess due to inclement weather). The second session was a short one where we began by attempting to play a game of chess. While we were setting up the pieces I mentioned that I thought the game was a difficult one since one had to think so many moves ahead. Molly just looked at me incredulously and exclaimed that it was easy and after a pause said that perhaps I shouldn t judge a game by its cover (RR March 15/02). She loved to play with words and phrases. We abandoned the game when we realized half the pieces were missing and she requested that I teach her how to play Chinese checkers instead.

April. April proved to be the last month where Molly stayed in for two recesses. During the first session she read *The Wonderful World of Seals and Whales* (Crow, 1984) and made quite a few reading errors, only some of which affected meaning. She did not stop to correct herself however, preferring to carry on, paying scant attention to the punctuation as she read. I found it difficult to follow her reading and noticed that I needed to be paying close attention to the pictures and following the text in order to understand the piece being read. Molly would be reading the text and suddenly, in the same breath, digress:

> Molly: (reading) how do you think whales catch their food? Some, like the killer whale grab fish with their big teeth and gulp them down. Just like that! Same with snakes. They swallow food whole.
>
> Me: Then what happens to it?
>
> Molly: Their strong stomach ingestints (sic) digestints (sic) they have strong stomach juices to help them. To help them digest their food (RR Apr 11/02).

Although she mispronounced the words ingest and digest I wondered if she knew their meanings. I also wondered why she rarely asked a word s pronunciation or meaning — did she think asking would somehow diminish her stature in my eyes? Molly continued reading and read briggles for bulges . After correcting her pronunciation of bulges she said it was a hard word and asked how I knew that it was a soft g and not a hard g . Although I would regularly correct certain words she mispronounced, she did not seem to feel self-conscious or resentful, she simply repeated the correct pronunciation and carried on.

Molly often became involved in her reading. She would react to new and interesting ideas with wonder and would attempt to answer any questions in the text before continuing with the reading. In my experience, most children do not stop their reading when there is a question in the text, let alone take the time to figure out if they know the answer. In this particular book one of the questions that was posed to the reader was, What other mammals live in the sea? Molly read the question and immediately got up to retrieve a book from the science section that she said would help her answer the question. Molly was constantly relating what she read to her real-life experiences. When she read that baby whales get piggybacks she mentioned how her stepfather often gave her piggybacks and how much fun it was; when she read about dolphins she described her submarine ride at West Edmonton Mall and how she saw a dolphin and it waved at her! When she read how scientists study sea mammals up close she began to list the things she d like to do when she grows up:

> Molly: When I grow up I m going to be a mountain climber I will take care of..ummm dolphins and [hiccups — excuses herself] ocearians (sic)and be a vegetarian. And last of all be like the Crocodile Hunter!
>
> Me: Do you mean a veterinarian?
>
> Molly: Veterinarian. Not a vegetarian (RR Apr 11/02).

Molly s choice of professions is consistent with what is reported in the literature. It is not unusual for gifted girls, at this age, to aspire to less traditional professional and scientific careers (Fox & Zimmerman, 1985). She was very excited about the career possibilities she saw for herself. There was never any question of ability or appropriateness in relation to her choices.

The second session in April occurred one week later. Molly started off the session by talking to the recorder: Today, me and Madame Gauthier are going to do a cool art project (RR Apr 18/02). She continued by describing exactly what we needed and what we would be doing — making a person using cut out paper shapes. Molly made reference to the fact that the class had been studying shapes in mathematics and she proudly picked up a cut out shape and said its name in both languages. Being very much in control of the session, she continued to give me detailed instructions on how to proceed:

> Molly: And you put your pencil down. Each person picks a color to color in the face.
>
> Me: Okay.
>
> Molly: The yellow is for the hair and the red is for the mouth.
>
> Me: Alright.
>
> Molly: You can do this with more people if you want so you can see the picture even better. Try not to go outside the lines. But if you do it **a little bit** that s okay. If you do it a lot you re way off the line. Way out of the course. That s a saying I made up.
>
> Me: Did you?
>
> Molly: Yup.
>
> Me: Way out of the course? That means exactly what?

> Molly: That means like you re outside the lines real bad. You re like you re off the course **way** over there [gestures to the other end of the classroom] and the course is way over here [gestures back to where we were sitting] (RR Apr 18/02).

When we both wanted to use the same crayon to color the eyes of our figure, Molly said that she would wait patiently for me to finish coloring my eye and then she d color her eye. I was getting the impression that she relished the role of teacher during our sessions together. Perhaps it was the only time she was allowed to have control of a situation or perhaps no one else wanted to listen to all she had to say. I also became aware that coloring within the lines had become important to her, which had not been the case at the beginning of the year when her scribbling of the Social Studies title page caught my attention. Coloring, she confided, had become something she really liked to do. I wondered if it was because she was fulfilling yet another school expectation, another rule — that you stay within the lines when you color.

Molly also spoke of how much fun one could have doing this art activity (she called it a game) using different shapes like octagons and hebdagons, hevergones or whatever they re called. Near the end of the session I commented on the appearance of the picture we had created which led Molly into a short discussion on her mother s ailments:

> Me: That is very cute. Where s his chin though? Where s the bottom of his face?
>
> Molly: Yea. There s always something missing! [silent period]. A neck!

Me: A neck. I see.

Molly: Speaking about a neck, my mommy has a bit of a neck pain.

Me: Does she?

Molly: Yea.

Me: I wonder why?

Molly: I know why. She had it since a very long time.

Me: Oh.

Molly: Because she fell out of a car and her neck hit the edge of the sidewalk.

Me: Oh dear.

Molly: Many injuries happen to my mommy.

Me: That s no fun huh?

Molly: But she s getting **much, much** better now!

Me: Oh good.

Molly: Her neck pain and back pain are all better but the only thing that s wrong with her now is that she gets headaches everyday.

Me: Oh dear!

Molly: Sometimes I m starting to get headaches now.

Me: Are you?

Molly: I don t know why. Heh, this is funny. One time, right away one time we were going to a house and right away when my mom said headache, I **got a headache!**

She spoke often of her mother s ailments and of her trip to India before she was born. Molly was very proud and impressed that her mother had been to India and was also proud that she could speak two languages. This was the first indication that Molly might be emulating her mother s ailments. Molly ended the session by declaring that we had finished our creation of two — a craft done cooperatively. This was yet another example of her playing with words.

May. May was a busy month. A professional development day, a long weekend, numerous meetings and three days of workshops resulted in no available recess meeting times for the students. Although I did not meet with Molly during recesses this month, I carried out the first interviews with both of Molly s families and with Molly herself. In the following section I presented the information garnered in these three separate interviews. I began with the father s (Bill s) interview (Family #1), followed by the mother s (Jessica s) interview (Family #2), and ended the chapter with Molly s comments to my questions. For the first two interviews I presented Bill s and Jessica s viewpoints concerning the early signs of giftedness; their perceptions of giftedness; the testing in kindergarten; Molly s reading and writing abilities; their expectations of school and staff; what was done to promote her language abilities and the positive and negative points of having a gifted child. This was followed by Molly s comments relating to questions such as the kind of books she liked to read, what she liked to write, the kind of shows she enjoyed watching on television, as well as her thoughts on friendship, school, and the future. Quotes from the first interviews were coded as follows: Family #1 (Bill and Sherry) — INT 1a/date; Family #2

(Jessica and Darin) — INT 1b/date; Molly — INT 1c/dateThe interview questions for Families #1 and #2 can be found in Appendix A. The interview questions for Molly can be found in Appendix B. The section concludes with the one recess we met in June — our last session together in grade one.

First interview — Family #. I arrived at Molly s father s house shortly after supper one evening in early May and was greeted at the door by the father, his partner Sherry and Molly s two step-siblings. They had obviously been told about my visit and were very lively, very bouncy and yet somewhat shy. After some preliminary inquiries into how things were going in general, we all went to sit at the kitchen table where I was offered a cup of coffee. I set up my microphone in the middle of the table and patiently answered the children s questions, What s that? Why do you need it? What does it do? I got the feeling that this was not going to be an easy interview to transcribe as the children were very vocal and were constantly demanding attention from one of their parents. They were very accommodating to their requests and when the time seemed appropriate — about 10 minutes after sitting down - we began the interview. I began by asking the question — when did you first realize Molly might be gifted?

Bill reported that he never noticed anything unusual about Molly during her early years. It wasn t until Molly began pre-school and the personnel there told him they were amazed at her reading capabilities, her knowledge of phonics and her sophisticated conversations that he had any inkling that she may be different from the other children. He never gave it much thought however, never did anything differently at home and remarked that he didn t think she was really reading — he thought she had just memorized the lines because they had read the books so often.   at one point we thought Molly s reading skills are[sic] very, very good for her age but based on how simple the books were and how often we would repeat reading that same book that she was just memorizing everything and we thought that it wasn t that she was reading she was just memorizing. (INT 1a/May 8, 2002). When the psychologist s report came from the school near the end of kindergarten, indicating that she qualified for the gifted program, he was shocked. Bill said he did not believe the results — I didn t I don t believe the results at all. I had no knowledge on tests and when you accompany it with an IQ based on these particular uh questions, or what the test was, I never seen the tests or anything. But at her young age I didn t think that was you could do that? (INT 1a/May 8,2002). Although Bill and Sherry were phoned and were asked permission to carry out the testing, they were never invited to go over the results with the psychologist, as the mother had been. As many parents are laboring under misconceptions of giftedness and because labeling has many ramifications, parents need information and support to understand the test results and their limitations and to acknowledge their child s abilities (Porter, 1999). Since the results were not shared with them, it was not surprising that neither Bill nor Sherry were happy that the testing had taken place. They were afraid Molly would be labeled, that she would hang out with older kids , that she would somehow lose out on her childhood and sometimes they regretted that it had taken place. Sherry offered her reasoning on why she would not have gone through with the testing:

> I don t even know if I can explain it. This is just .but what would it matter either way? Who she is before she takes the test and who she is after? It doesn t do anything for anyone. It doesn t do anything for her knowing that, although, you know they were trying to do special things at school and stuff but I just think that back to when I was in school when there were smart people and there were average people and there were not so smart people right? And no one needed to get tested to know that. And everyone did the same course load and it just showed later in their life, right? Where they were going to go with it depending on how well they did and stuff, right?(INT 1a/May 8,2002)

Bill then shared his feelings on why they were beginning to regret the outcome of the testing:

> But when Molly talks to me and says that she s having trouble playing with some of her schoolmates or getting along with them then automatically I think that it s got to do with being labeled. But I realize that the children at this age do not put labels on kids, right? They don t know that but they also see her getting taken out of the classroom, doing a special project and maybe doing a presentation later on in the week that s different from the gang, so can kids at that age put two and two together and say Oh Molly s getting this special treatment. Molly s the teacher s pet. Now we re going to start picking on her? I don t know (INT 1a/May 8,2002).

Contrary to the popular belief that all parents think their child is gifted in some way, it seemed that Bill attempted to deny Molly s giftedness while Sherry attempted to diminish its importance. Perhaps they did not want her to be gifted and incorrectly assumed that gifted children were not well adjusted (Porter, 1999). Both the father and the stepmother viewed giftedness as socially unacceptable and/or disastrous and would have preferred she be well-adjusted and normal instead (Rimm, 1995). According to Silverman (1986), mothers and fathers have very different conceptions of giftedness. It is usually the mother who perceives the child as gifted and not the father. Although in this situation the father and the stepmother shared the same views, it will be shown later that the mother had a different outlook. Silverman (1986) believes that there are distinct feminine and masculine perspectives of giftedness. In the masculine view, the true test of a person s abilities is the quantity, quality, and influence of one s accomplishments as an adult. Since a person s professional impact on humanity is usually assessed posthumously, fathers become uneasy if their child is labeled gifted as he feels the child may be being set up for failure. His protective reaction therefore, is to deny his child s giftedness (Silverman, 1986). This could explain Bill and Sherry s positions on Molly s giftedness. Although Sherry shared what seems to be the same masculine view of giftedness as her partner, the reasons for this are likely attributable to home, school and environmental factors while growing up rather than gender.

Bill and Sherry were very concerned about the labeling that seemed to be an inevitable consequence of the test results and the subsequent special programming for Molly at school. Neither parent wanted the special treatment she may receive at school to result in her being ostracized from her peers, picked on by others — nor did they want her to get a big head . When I asked whether or not they had told her she was gifted, both immediately replied no and Sherry offered the following elaboration:

> See, I don t bring up stuff like that because stuff like that is not important to me. I ve said that even .I did while in school as a child. I always did fine. My mom was illiterate and I lived with her on my own and I got A s all the time so it had nothing to do with the help I got at home or . Whatever, right, I was just capable. But like, I ve said to Bill before, if either one of these two children are underachievers and getting D s and stuff, I don t think that would break my heart as much as them not being good people. So, to me it s you re smart, you re smart big deal, right? Like I don t . I guess I mean we encourage her learning and stuff like that. We don t treat her like she s not or treat her like she is. She s just Molly to us, right? (INT 1a/May 8,2002)

It is not surprising that they were more concerned about her being a good and normal person than about developing her potential as a gifted female. Perhaps confusion over what it meant to have a gifted child resulted in fear about what they were supposed to do about it, whether they were capable of doing anything about it or whether it meant that she would expect special opportunities or if she expected to be treated differently than her siblings. A curious finding in Kerr s (1994) follow-up study on the female graduates of her high school s Accelerated Learning Program was that most of the women preferred to deny they were gifted or special in any way even though they had been tested as such and had received special schooling. Responses to the question about what their parents had told them about their giftedness shed some light on their denial of the same. Parents aided in the development of their daughter s attitude by saying nothing about their giftedness or by offering the following kinds of comments: they were lucky and it was nothing to brag about; or they shouldn t get a big head over it; or she ll just have to learn that she s not so special (Kerr, 1994). Her study indicated that the adult women had largely come to agree with their parents that being gifted was not okay. Bill and Sherry felt that Molly was being pumped up a lot at her mother s house and therefore they decided that they would not do the same at their home. They felt that it was important that Molly see the other side of the street . Although Molly s mother also wanted Molly to be a good person — that is someone who was kind, compassionate, polite and understanding, she also saw the importance and joy of learning and wanted Molly to be challenged in school.

When I asked what Molly thought about her reading ability, Sherry responded, She thinks she s God. She thinks she s amazing. She thinks she s better than everyone else when it comes to that. (INT 1a/May 8,2002). Bill added that Molly is now correcting his reading. And she s been doing it for awhile. And I could just of worked a 15 hour shift and come home and I m reading with one eye and I mispronounce a word and she s gonna (sic) make me go back because I ve always done that to her. So now it s flipped over and she s doing it to me (INT 1a/May 8, 2002). I gathered that they thought Molly was rather conceited in terms of her reading ability and did not give credence to the fact that perhaps she was a good reader for her age. Bill and Sherry confirmed what Molly s mother had stated about Molly s writing abilities. Molly did not believe herself to be a good writer. They attributed her lack of interest in this area to a lack of persistence on her part. If she can t do it right the first time, she doesn t want to bother. She slacks it off (INT 1a/May 8, 2002). Bill confirmed that she would do workbook pages for homework if he insisted but wouldn t initiate the activity on her own — she would rather go to the nearby park and play. She d read anytime without prompting but writing was a different matter.

When I asked what their expectations were for Molly, from the school and the teachers, they both replied that they liked what I was doing for her at that time. The special projects, the presentations in front of the class, the fact that I was keeping her mind occupied and allowing her to have access to the school library so she could bring French and English books home, were some of the positive initiatives they mentioned. Bill conceded that he didn t have a clue what she s doing in school and only made the above comment based on information I had shared with him when I saw him in the hallways over the last few months. Neither Bill nor Sherry knew if her other teachers (music, gym, and science) were differentiating the curriculum for her but since she continued to receive an excellent report card, they did not question whether she was being challenged academically in any of the subject areas. I noted that their concern about Molly s being perceived as different because of the special activities she was engaged in the classroom seemed to have changed since the beginning of the interview. I sensed that they were realizing that Molly needed more challenges than the average child and were feeling a little uncomfortable that they hadn t done anything extra to promote her abilities.

Although Molly s mother, Jessica, could not think of any negative aspects about having a gifted child, the opposite was true for Bill and Sherry. They felt that when people find out she s gifted they expect her to understand things normal six year olds don t and they expect her to be gifted in all areas not just language arts. Although Bill and Sherry wanted to keep things low key and normal at their home, Sherry also had expectations based on Molly s giftedness that weren t being met. She expressed frustration that Molly wasn t more logical and assumed that because she could read well and comprehend what she was reading, this should translate into being able to communicate what she d read in a meaningful way. Sherry found it trying when Molly was unable to summarize what she d read and when she wasn t able to use her newly acquired knowledge in a conversation. If she can read and comprehend and memorize and know all these different things, why don t things make sense to her .when you re communicating? [If I say], Tell me what the book said and she goes to open it and I say, No, don t open it, tell me what it said. And she won t remember but half an hour later she could tell me word for word what the book said (INT 1a/ May 8/02).

Both Bill and Sherry downplayed Molly s giftedness and attempted to provide a stable environment where she could engage in different activities such as crafts, playing with her step-sisters, sewing on a small child-sized sewing machine, and helping with the cooking by writing down ingredients that are needed. They were also concerned with Molly s social and emotional well being and endeavored to teach her compassion, understanding and manners, hoping that she would become a well-adjusted child as she matured. In the area of schooling, Bill and Sherry let Molly go at her own pace . If she overachieves great and if she underachieves we ll help (INT 1a/May 8, 2002). I am not sure what would constitute overachievement in their eyes and since they stated that they were not really aware of what Molly was doing in school, I m not sure how they would have recognized whether or not she was underachieving. I assumed they meant if her marks began to drop. What was clear was the importance they accorded to her social/emotional well being, which was decidedly more resolute than that of any academic fulfillment. Although for most parents a drop in marks would be a valid signal of their child s underachievement, it is not a reliable indicator for parents of gifted children and particularly for gifted girls (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Gifted children are generally successful in school and their grades often do not reflect their real achievement (Coleman & Cross, 2001). They rarely fail courses. The first signs of underachievement in gifted girls are often subtle; they begin around puberty (normally eleven years old but earlier in gifted girls); and are not reflected in grades (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Kerr, 1994). Gifted girls often continue to achieve high marks throughout junior and senior high school as measured by grade point average and any indication of underachievement might first be noticed in their selection of courses in junior high.

The last question of the interview was in regards to what they were doing to promote Molly s language abilities. Bill described how he had introduced reading to Molly when she was still in the womb. As he recounted, at the time the belief was that playing music and talking to the fetus was thought to be pre-linguistic and contributed to the baby s foundation for language skills. Although he did not practice the aforementioned on a regular basis he did not discount the effect it may have had on Molly s subsequent development. After Molly was born, Bill made sure that whenever he spoke to her she watched his lips and, at times, he would move her head if necessary. He believed this would help with her speech when she began to talk. It was only after Molly began speaking in short sentences that he initiated what he considered to be some formal training in reading. His approach to teaching Molly to read was phonics based, the same way he had been taught. Both Bill and Sherry read leveled books to Molly, phonics books and regularly practiced word flashcards when she was three and four years old. Molly was also given Ready, Set, Read — a simple computer that reads a set of accompanying books to the listener. A book is placed in the indented space of the computer and a voice immediately says, Open the book and press the green triangle . It is an interactive pre-reading tool that has the listener press certain keys to have a voice read the text, read a specific word, pronounce the word if desired. Pressing particular keys lets the listener hear the page read again, lets the listener attempt to read the page on their own (whereupon they can press any word they are having difficulty with to hear its pronunciation) or they can read along with the voice. This pre-reading tool is phonics based and helps emergent readers learn directionality, segmenting, vowel sounds, rhyming and pronunciation. Molly regularly used this tool and it has now been passed on to her siblings.

Bill engaged in another pre-reading activity with Molly that I found interesting. While reading storybooks, Bill would always ask comprehension questions and he insisted that Molly notice everything on the page — not just the words — before he went onto the next page. He would explain the page there could be a little bird up there. I want to make sure she sees the bird. She s not just looking at the words. So once she understands that page fully then we can go to the next page. Then it makes more sense (INT 1a/ May 8, 2002). Bill talked a lot about what was on each page and got Molly to pay attention to details. Although perhaps unaware of the importance of talking about books, Bill was teaching Molly how to use pictures to help make sense of text, he was helping her understand how stories work, how to look beyond the literal and he was helping her learn about language. As Dean (1998) states, learning about language is a social enterprise and the necessary metalangue a child requires for textual comprehension, comparison and review will only grow from dialogue (not interrogation) with a more experienced and knowledgeable reader (p. 44). He defines metalangue as the linguistic knowledge a child possesses of the ways the different forms of language it employs are actually put to use (p. 10). These kinds of dialogues, he continues, should be encouraged both at home and at school for their value lies in the opportunity afforded to children to articulate their perceptions, insights and opinions and to have them challenged and expanded.

Molly was fortunate enough to have the kinds of dialogues that enabled her to learn about language.

The next interview, with Molly s mother, Jessica, (Family #2), took place a week later and the information garnered from that interview is presented next.

First Interview — Family #2. I arrived at Molly s mother and stepfather s house at our pre-arranged time one evening in May, to conduct our first interview, only to find that Jessica (Molly s mother) believed our meeting was taking place at the school and had gone there. It s still not clear to me how this miscommunication happened, however, we both had cell phones and the interview eventually took place in the staff lunchroom at school without further incident. I had wanted to conduct the interview in a place that was comfortable for Jessica and Darin (I had assumed that they would both be present), which is why I had suggested their home. Upon reflection, there may have been several reasons why she believed or wanted the interview to be at school. First, she knew that I was conducting a separate interview with Molly and Molly was staying with them at that time. Perhaps she knew that we would not have been able to have a private conversation with Molly in the house. Second, Jessica also knew that I would be asking questions about different aspects of the first four years of Molly s life and I am not sure how much Darin was a part of their lives at that time. It might have been difficult, therefore, for him to participate in the interview questions. There is also the possibility that my desires for the interview had not been made clear. Despite the initial confusion over meeting place and some initial nervousness, the interview progressed from a slightly stilted question/answer phase to a conversation between friends, replete with stories, wonder, bewilderment, and laughter. It was an experience that began the building of trust, commitment and the development of deeper understandings by offering a direct access to experience, [and] revealing a complexity of reactions, feelings, and thoughts (Weber, 1986, p. 70).

Jessica remembered a number of early signs that led her to believe there was something special about Molly: as a newborn she would not sleep so Jessica carried her about, talking to her and showing her things; she held her head up at 2 weeks; at four months she said mama ; she was walking at 10 months; at 18 months she had a vocabulary of approximately 56 words and she began speaking sentences at 19 months. Jessica shared that she often talked and sang, in French and English, to Molly during the first few years of her life. The visits to the doctor only reinforced her initial observations and she was told that Molly was reaching important milestones in her development much earlier than was normal. There were two later incidents however, that stood out in Jessica s mind as being indicators that perhaps she had a gifted child.

The first occurred when Molly was two years old and read the words baby and donut in the newspaper. Jessica insisted that neither word had a picture prompt near it — which is why she was so astonished with Molly s ability to recognize them. The second incident occurred when Jessica recounted a dream of Molly s to a friend. The friend was amazed that at two years old Molly knew what a dream was and was retelling them in great detail. Jessica had assumed this was normal and remembered being somewhat embarrassed at her friend s reaction. Henceforth, Jessica was careful what she shared with the other mothers because, although she was proud of Molly s capabilities, she did not want to seem like she was bragging about Molly and she felt that some of the mothers were jealous.

Although outwardly, Jessica did not like to compare Molly to the other children her age, inwardly she could not help but notice that she was much more advanced than her peers. She began to expect more of Molly. She did not use baby talk with Molly and would not allow other adults to talk to her in that fashion. Jessica related that she used big words in talking with Molly and found that after a time she would start using them herself. Jessica also had the expectation that if Molly did not understand something she would ask questions for clarification or just say she did not understand. Having no one to talk to about Molly s advanced accomplishments, Jessica wondered if she was just passing through a phase .maybe it s not such a big deal I m sure there s other more child [sic] out there than her (INT 1b/May 15, 2002). Even though Jessica believed Molly was unique and was treating her differently, the formal identification of giftedness did not come until kindergarten.

At the request of her kindergarten teacher, Molly was given the *Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence — Revised* (WPPSI-R) (Wechsler, 2002) by the district s psychologist near the end of kindergarten. Jessica explained to Molly that she was being tested because she was smart — she did not use the word gifted — she could read well and she had the advantage of being able to understand things more quickly than other children. Jessica made sure that she understood that she was never to brag about her intelligence. According to her mother, Molly loved the testing time and when the psychologist later phoned with the results, he mentioned that she was one of the most all round gifted children that he had tested over the years and jokingly asked if he could adopt her. Jessica was not surprised at the psychologist s remark and proudly shared that Molly is a sensitive child who wanted everyone to love her. Although pleased with this aspect of Molly s personality, she also shared how it was beginning to cause her problems at school. Molly often got frustrated, when she didn t get her way during group work or when a perceived injustice was done to her, and she immediately reacted by crying. She spoke to Molly of her bouts of tears in class and how she would be teased if she continued to react in that manner. you better try to toughen up a bit you re in a man s world and be a woman .you gotta learn (INT 1b/May 15, 2002)

As the interview continued we spoke of Molly s reading abilities and Jessica shared that Molly was very proud of her reading. At their home Jessica recounted that Molly reads the Time Life series of books that she was given as a child (approximately twelve books) on topics such as insects, the jungle, fish, the sea and the ocean. A small bookshelf in her room also contained Pokemon and Digimon books, as well as a number of other non-fiction books. Jessica mentioned that she too loves to read non-fiction books and had about two hundred books at home. My mind doesn t like to be idle. I need to learn new things all the time and Molly is like that. (INT 1b/May 15, 2002). She also shared that she speed reads and can easily finish a 350-page book in an evening.

Although she had not shown or talked to Molly about this method of reading, she believed Molly had heard her talk about it to others. Jessica also hoped that Molly would take after her in reading and writing, as she considered herself to be proficient in both domains.

While Molly considered herself to be a good reader, Jessica said that Molly did not believe she was a good writer — and by this Molly meant she did not print neatly. At the beginning of the school year I sent an ABC booklet home with some of the students so they could practice their printing. Jessica shared with me that Molly hated practicing in that booklet. After much encouragement from both Jessica and Darin she would acquiesce but when they tried to persuade her to do more than one page she would lament, Stop it! My brain is sweating! (INT 1b/ May 15, 2002). Her writing, at this time, was difficult to decipher but this practice exercise proved to be anything but stimulating for her.

Jessica felt that the school and the teachers were responsible for providing stimulating and challenging activities to meet Molly s educational needs. She also wanted the school to help Molly continue to develop her social skills, to help her make friends, to respect others, to mind her manners and in turn, she would make sure that Molly did not become snotty or arrogant .

Jessica did not see anything negative about having a gifted child. She felt grateful that she was able to have wonderful conversations with her daughter and to this end encouraged her to read to augment her vocabulary. Jessica also felt that Molly s ability to express her emotions created a special bond between them that resulted in a wonderful communicative closeness— something she hoped would continue.

At the end of our interview I asked what she was doing to promote Molly s language abilities and her immediate response was, Listen to her talk! (INT 1b/May 15, 2002). Molly, apparently, always had a lot to share. Anything that she did not have time to tell her mother before bed, she would recount first thing in the morning, along with any dreams that she may have had. Her brain never shuts up I think! (INT 1b/May 15, 2002). Jessica said she also spent a lot of time explaining life to Molly — about why certain things are the way they are (INT 1b/May 15, 2002). She found that Molly could explain things well for her age, could reason ably and she was continually amazed at Molly s level of comprehension — albeit she sometimes found it weird . Our interview ended on a positive note, with Jessica promising to jot down any information or incidents she felt would help this study.

In the next section I present the highlights of Molly s responses to my interview questions, which can be found in Appendix B. Two separate noon hour recesses were needed to get through the fifteen questions.

First interview - Molly. I asked Molly if she would stay in for the noon hour recess on May 14, 2002. As was becoming customary, she was very accommodating, even after I explained that we would not be reading, playing a game or doing a craft because there were some questions I wanted to ask her. We sat at a long table at the back of the classroom and as we began I noticed her eyes travel to the tape recorder, making sure that I had turned it on.

I began the session by asking her what she liked to do at home. Without hesitation she replied she liked to read books, that most of her books were science books and that she had already read all of them. Molly continued by listing the shows she liked to watch on their digital television (sic) — programs such as Crocodile Hunter, Pokemon, Digimon, Sailor Moon, Incredible Hulk , Spiderman (adding quickly Spiderman classic in color) - mostly the old ones . I noted that most of the television shows she mentioned (other than Sailor Moon and perhaps Pokemon) were programs that generally appealed to boys rather than girls. The programs feature large, strong, male, main characters that successfully fight off evil during action-packed adventures. Crocodile Hunter is an information program, shot in the Australian outback, whose male host mingles with and/or handles elusive, often dangerous, animals and insects, sharing interesting facts and advice. It was also interesting to note that Molly s preferences in television programs were similar to the types of books girls like to read. Girls read comparatively more adventure, horror, and animal stories than boys, although crime and detective works were relatively evenly balanced in popularity (Hall & Coles, 1998). Girls are said to live vicariously through some of the books they read (Millard, 1997). Perhaps Molly enjoyed the more masculine type television programs because she lived vicariously through them and they gave her a greater sense of power.

Another activity that Molly mentioned she liked to do at home was what she called Darin s Tickle Torture . As she described it, it is a game where her stepfather tickles her until she can no longer bear it. Molly also indicated that she played the same game with her father but that he does it in a different way . She had often mentioned this game in previous conversations as one that she engaged in when she was bored and had nothing to do. As was often the case during our regular recess sessions, Molly digressed from the conversation and launched into a story about dreams and a spiky tongue :

> Molly: I had a dream today and it was about me at school with my friends and wanted to hold their hand or something like that. I always fell (inaudible) down. Because it s in my dream and I couldn t I couldn t hold their hand. And I was floating all over the place and I was on the chair and the chair was floating all over the place. And sometimes even my tongue feels all spiky.
>
> Me: Feels spiky?
>
> Molly: Yea. That happened at computer time. Sometimes my tongue feels like there are spikes on it.
>
> Me: So what do you do then?
>
> Molly: Just wait for it to go away. Now let s get on to question number two.

Molly effectively cut the conversation so I would continue with the questions. She had told me what she wanted to say, it was of no further importance and from her perspective it was time to move on. During this dismissive response she was sitting upright in the chair, hands folded in her lap as if to say keep going, keep going let s not waste time . I found this behavior intriguing because her verbal response and her body language exhibited a fierce determination in a way that only a child could muster. I hoped this kind of determination would continue during her school years.

The next few questions focused on whether she felt she was different from others, what she was good at and not so good at, and what she was trying to improve. Molly did not hesitate in saying she was very different from the others because, I know most .I m mostly the one who really loves animals then. Like reptiles and stuff more than any other person. Some people just kinda like animals but I LOVE them like crazy! .[and] I m just as good as a reader as Neil [a classmate in her advanced group] but I m just a bit tad bedder(sic) than him because .bedder than better than him because I ve been reading since I was two! (INT 1c/May 14, 2002). It was evident she thought she was smarter than her peers but did not want to brag. Molly felt that she was a good reader and that she knew a lot about reptiles but complained that she was probably the only person in class who could not tie their shoelaces or the only one who couldn t ride a bicycle without training wheels. I hadn t yet asked the question about what she was not so good at and although she may have anticipated it, I believe that her complaints about what she couldn t do, said in the same sentence as the acknowledgements of her strengths, were a strategy she used so as not to appear boastful or she could have been dismissing what she could not do.

In response to the question of what she was not so good at, Molly had to stop and think before replying that she was not so good at not trying to bite my tongue [and] I m not too good at having patience (INT 1c/May 14, 2002). She went on to describe a time when her family experienced a lengthy wait at Tony

Roma s restaurant and how the staff called a multitude of names to be seated before their name came up. Her mother encouraged her to be patient but Molly found it very taxing. I noted that she must not have considered any school subjects difficult since they were not mentioned in her answer. Perhaps she was focused on non-school issues and I did not pursue the matter.

When Molly was asked if there was anything she was trying to improve she mentioned drawing and printing. The way she went about trying to improve in those areas was by asking her peers what they thought of her work. If they showed enthusiasm and said they liked it, she took that as an indication that she had improved — ...my writing used to look all yukky and stuff and now it s very talented . I thought it was an interesting use of the word talented — another example of the way she plays with language. Molly probably heard the word talented used in reference to herself and perhaps she assumed that if it could be used in reference to a person it could also be used in reference to something that person does well. It seemed that her mind was always busy making connections.

As has been previously noted and as Molly had indicated numerous times in our conversations, she loved reading science books above all else. She had reservations about reading fiction books because they weren t about animals but qualified her statement by saying that if they had an animal character in them she might kinda like it but if they don t I don t like it so much . She had found an exception however - the *Captain Underpants* (Pilkey, 1997) books. She insisted on going to the shelf and getting a copy of one of the books to show me how funny the pictures and the words were:

> Me: So what is it about *Captain Underpants* that you like?
>
> Molly: Well, because it has really funny stuff in it. Like I ll show you one. (Goes to the shelf and gets one.) I really, really like this book because of the really funny things.
>
> Me: The really funny things in it? Is it the words or the pictures that you like?
>
> Molly: The pictures and and the words. Everything. Actually, I like everything. And there s something really funny in this. See our big football game today. And then they . And then they fix and made it all funny and say, Boy our feet smell bad!
>
> Me: That s pretty funny huh?
>
> Molly: And something else (she flips through the pages) I wonder where it is? Okay. And I think the other one is *Captain Underpants and the Attack of the Talking Toilets*. And this one is not the same Okay. This is what it does. Chapter One. Today s Lunch. New tasty cheese and lentil pot, pots (?)
>
> Me: Oh, they re going to change that .
>
> Molly: Messy toilet pee-pee samwiches! (sic) (giggles) (INT 1c/May 22, 2002)

I must admit that I did not see the humor in these books but Molly and many of the other children (mostly boys) in class loved them. There was irony in

Molly s penchant for these books. Pilkey admited to having ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and shared that he spent most of his elementary years in a desk out in the hallway, which was where he began doodling the characters in his books (Retrieved August 24, 2004 from http://www.cnn.com/2000/books). The books were designed to engross reluctant readers — mostly boys between 7 and 10 years old, who were fond of their crude sense of humor. Molly did not fit the stereotype of a *Captain Underpants* reader. She was hardly a reluctant reader, she was not a boy and her normally prim and proper demeanor and behavior was not conducive to a person who enjoyed toilet humor. These books were in stark contrast to the serious type of books she normally read. I wondered what attracted her to this series.

The books are presented in a comic book format with chapters and Flip-O-Rama pages (Pilkey s name for flip-page animation). The humor is representative of many young children s way of thinking - as is evidenced by three of the six titles: *Captain Underpants and The Attack of the Talking Toilets, Captain Underpants and The Perilous Plot of Professor Poopypants and Captain Underpants and The Wrath of the Wicked Wedgie Woman* (Pilkey, 1997,1999). Although children love these books, many parents and teachers are uncomfortable with their content. Senior correspondent Beth Nissen of the Cable News Network (CNN) reviewed the books and wrote: while the plots of the stories are very silly, the writing has wit and sophistication. Sentences are salted with vocabulary-building words, used in clear and helpful context: "hideous," "convenient," "merciless," "gullible." Young readers are exposed to compound sentences, the concept of synonyms, and alliteration, to which Pilkey is particularly prone. The books encourage children to not only read words, but to play with them, like toys (Retrieved August 24, 2004 from http://www.cnn.com/2000/books). I had been encouraging Molly to broaden her reading experiences with books other than science books. Happily, yet not surprisingly, she discovered the Pilkey (1997, 1999) books and took a liking to them, probably because she enjoyed playing with words, she enjoyed humor and so perhaps these books satisfied those basic reading needs for her.

Although Molly had mentioned, in an earlier conversation, the title of the first book she remembered reading, I could find no record of it and so I asked again if she remembered the book, the title and how she felt when she was reading it. This time her response to the title of the book was the little picture dictionary thingamajiggy . She could not remember the title but mentioned why she liked the book:

> Molly: Well. The first book I read, was I already said it s a really funny book and it s a bit non-fiction and at the same time it s a bit fiction. The pictures look fictiony (sic). And what I like about that book is when I I can play with that book. And what I mean is that when I take one of my little mini toys like my reptiles or something like that because I have very small reptile toys. I can put them onto the little picture squares things and I can act .and the book makes like a acting scene. Cause the pages .there s a picture of a house and a living room and a kitchen. So, I like that book because it it helps me .it helps me figure out stuff for the

stuff. What type of stuff there are. And at the same time I can also have fun playing with my little animals on it.

Me: Can you tell me when you said they re non-fiction kinda pictures ?

Molly: No. Kinda fiction pictures

Me: Right. What does that mean? What s the difference?

Molly: Well, when I look at a pic .when I look at a picture in a not...in a real non-fiction book and in a fiction book they look really different.

Me: How, do you know? (She gets up to go get a book) Can you just describe rather than show?

Molly: Well, the way I see. When I see non-fiction it seems more life-likeable(sic) to me. Like, like really in the wild to me. Because when ummm when I look at a fiction book I see that it doesn t look more life-likeable because the pictures aren t made .aren t made .aren t photographed BUT sometimes when I .when I read a non-fiction book the picture look(sic) kinda fictiony. Like, like that nut one. OR there s also one of those books in our little library. It s called *Ducks Don t Get Wet.*

Me: Oh, I remember that one.

Molly: Yea. It has pictures that aren t photographed so at first when it was in there I thought it was a fiction book because of the pictures. But once I saw the reading information, the words, I really realized that it was a non-fiction book (INT 1c/May 22, 2002).

Molly demonstrated a basic understanding of the elements differentiating fiction and non-fiction books — for example, she knew that many fiction books had illustrations and narrative text whereas non-fiction books were more likely to contain photographs and informational text. It also appeared that she recognized that informational and narrative texts are arranged differently on the page. As often as possible I asked Molly to explain her thinking. I found it fascinating to hear her learn, to see the joy of new understandings on her face and it helped me to better understand her.

According to Molly people read because sometimes they want to learn information, sometimes just for fun or sometimes they read so they could get theirself (sic) tired. That s what I sometimes do (INT 1c/May 22, 2002). She indicated that she most often read Fairy Tales and Mother Goose books to put herself to sleep but on occasion would read a non-fiction book. I never asked why those kinds of books made her sleepy and can only surmise that the reason may be linked to the amount of concentration required during the reading. When asked who read her stories when she was little her first response was her daddy . Sherry would read to her when her father was absent and she also indicated that her mother read to her. Her father mostly read her books that they owned — titles such as*Peter and the Wolf, Donald Duck, Lucky, 101 Dalmatians, Lion King* — all the Disney stuff. And he still reads me books. And when I was a little bit older, at six, he read me *Sharks* from our [school] library. Molly also shared that she had watched the Disney movies of the books she had read. Molly s mother read her Jan Louise s Fairy Tales - I think it was when I was four or five. Apparently, she also read her non-fiction books, but when I was a bit older and it was a few days ago when I was still six and I was still in grade one and it was still in May (INT 1c/May 22, 2002).

When asked what she liked most about school Molly answered math because she was good at it and continued with an example of her knowledge of the subject:

> Molly: I even know what one hundred plus .take I even know what three take away four is .negative one.
>
> Me: Whoa. Where did you learn that negative?
>
> Molly: Well, Sherry taught me. She learned it in a higher grade in another grade so .or in university or something like that .and so I did and so I thought three take away four equals zero still but she told me that three take away four equals negative one.
>
> Me: Yes, that s right.
>
> Molly: I like saying that word negative.
>
> Me: But do you know what that means negative ?
>
> Molly: Hmm... Well, negative must mean before, before. Like add another before. So it s
>
> Me: Before what?
>
> Molly: So it s a double zero. It s add another so there s another number. Numbers even go past zero. Then it s .then there s a zero side. Negative one, negative two .I think there s even negative one hundred! (INT 1c/May 22, 2002)

Molly proudly presented how she understood the concept of negative numbers. Her interests and understandings continued to amaze and please me. I had to laugh when I asked what she did not like about school and the only negative aspect she could come up with was standing and walking in line.

The next two questions revolved around writing — what was her favorite kind of writing and why she thought people wrote. When she attempted to answer the first question, it was apparent that she had not understood what I meant. She said that she liked Chinese writing because it looked cool . Molly announced that maybe when she grew up she would be a Chinese writer and that she knew how to write, thank you in Chinese. Upon further probing she said she learned this through a television program called Sagua the Chinese Siamese Cat — the main character being a cat that could write Chinese. It was apparent that Molly was not only gaining knowledge through books but through some of the television programs she watched as well. It was also becoming evident that her reading preferences and ability were influencing her leisure pursuits — in this instance, her choice of television programs. Shortly after this interesting detour I explained what I meant when I asked her what she liked to write. Her answer was revealing: I LOVE . sometimes I just . most of the time I don t like to write. I like to do the opposite of writing - reading (INT 1c/May 22, 2002). When I asked her why she did not like to write she frowned and in a frustrated voice said, I like making stories but whenever I read it sometimes it s never right and. sometimes I just . I always want to color before I write sometimes I don t know why I don t like to write. The writing I mostly don t write in is French. Because there are lots of accents and you always have to put lots of weird looking letters. And I just like to draw normal letters (INT 1c/ May 22, 2002). Molly was used to reading quickly, speaking quickly and getting answers to her questions quickly. To Molly, writing was a painfully slow and arduous process that, at this time, resulted in few intrinsic rewards. However, she knew something about why people write — people write because before they had televisions they must have wrote (sic) the news. You also need writing to read. Writing helps you read too, cause you can t read just a plain piece of paper. You have to have letters on it (INT 1c/ May 22, 2002). She confessed to enjoying writing little notes and letters on the computer to her mother and stepfather mostly because she could add happy, sad or mad faces in her text and thought that was fun. Molly never wrote a lot in grade one. It was evident she did not like the task because her finished products usually contained the minimum amount of writing required. For example, if I asked the students to retell the beginning, middle and end of a story using pictures and words, she would write one short sentence and draw an accompanying picture that, by the middle of the year, she would meticulously color. Other children in the class would write two or three sentences to describe each part of the story but Molly was happy with just writing one for each section. Molly did not put an enormous amount of effort into an assignment she did not like nor in one where she felt inadequate to the task. One of the academic problems facing gifted children in the primary years is the discrepancy between what they can understand and what they can write (Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990). Early readers typically read much better than they write. The physical demands of handwriting are so great for some gifted children of this age, that it is difficult to judge the quality of their ideas by their compositions (Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990). Molly often became frustrated that she could not write as fast as she could think and the resulting exasperation led more often than not to abandonment of the task.

To the question on whether friendships at school were important Molly vehemently replied, Why yes! and began to describe the difference between what she considered normal friends and real friends. According to Molly, to have a friend you had to like them a lot. Normal friends were those friends you like to walk with holding their hand or playing games with and real friends serve you pop and ice cream and stuff (INT 1c/May 22, 2002). She considered her friend Brenda a real friend because sometimes she s even fetching me my lunch kit. Her expressed concept of friendship was both interesting and disturbing. I found it interesting that she would consider Brenda a real friend because I don t remember them ever playing or working together. They never read together during silent reading time but Brenda belonged to a small group of popular girls to which, perhaps, Molly wanted to belong. I found her notion of serving and fetching as relating to friendship disturbing because it implied superiority. It could also have been an act of kindness.

At the end of the interview, I asked Molly what she would like to be when she grew up to which she replied, Oh! I have LOTS of things to say for that! Okay. When I grow up I want to be a mountain climber, I want to be a veterinarian, I want to be a (her eyes looked up, she was searching for a word) I want to work at oshariums(sic) and swim with the dolphins and take care of them. I want to be a deep-sea diver like your son, Adam. What else do I want to do? (to herself). And before we have way more kids I want to be a pet collector (INT 1c/ May 22, 2002). Upon re-reading this answer several thoughts came to mind. The first is that even though Molly did not know how to pronounce oceanarium (a large saltwater aquarium where marine animals and plants are exhibited) she knew what the word meant and her version, oshariums was correctly used in the sentence. Secondly, the first careers Molly listed were predictable in that they were related to animals— except, perhaps, her wish to be a mountain climber. They were also non-traditional careers, as were the ones mentioned and reported in an earlier conversation, and they again reflected her enthusiasm in her areas of interest. Although there is scant documentation on the career interests of young gifted girls, Molly s career interests are consistent with how young gifted girls feel about themselves and their future — that they can do and be anything they wish (Reis, 1998). Research has shown that although the majority of gifted are in professional or semi-professional careers, they have the potential for success in many careers (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Clark, 1997; Piirto, 1999).

The last statement in response to what she wanted to be when she grew up disturbed me. Perhaps if I had questioned her further my fears would have been allayed. However, the implication of her statement was that she had already accepted that children were in her future and was aware that role expectations might interfere with what she might want to do in life. According to

Hoyt and Hebeler (1974), the long-term, uninterrupted commitment that is required for career development is inconsistent with women s expectations for marriage and family. Is this the beginning of an interaction between internal barriers and external barriers in the realization of Molly s potential? Perhaps I am over generalizing; however, my concern is that maybe what we are really seeing in this instance is an earlier than normal effect of a socialization process that, despite our best efforts, has not changed significantly for women in the last decade. Reis (1998) stated that gifted females tackle conflicts and barriers that exist between their abilities and the social structures around them. The most difficult conflict they confront revolves around the different experiences they face as young gifted girls who believe they can do everything (p.33). Unfortunately, as they get older, many learn that their perception of reality differs from the life experiences they encounter (Reis, 1998).

The interview ended shortly before the bell rang and the children were filing in from recess. Molly seemed glad that it was over. I got the impression that she was looking forward to the next time we met so we could carry on with familiar, meaningful (to her) tasks — reading together, discussing life and engaging in different art projects.

June. The next session occurred at the beginning of June. It was to be our last in-class session together as the rest of the month was taken up with field trips, exams, testing sessions with myself and my recesses were taken up with extra supervisions and end of year paperwork. Molly chose to do a paper bag craft for our last session together. We were to make a people puppet because according to Molly, people were easier to make than animals. I got full instructions from Molly on how to proceed starting with drawing the eyes with felt pens. At one point she decided she was making a clown and I decided to make an owl, because unlike Molly, I figured animals would be easier to make and there was an example of one in a book on masks that we had in the class library. She thought that was cool and immediately said Did you know in fact that some birds have tongues? Some birds have very long tongues! (INT 1c/ May 22, 2002). Molly never stopped sharing what she knew and was always open to learning new information. To me it was a likable trait. Two interesting issues came up during our session. The first was the result of my asking her what she had liked best about grade one. I was hoping she would say that English or French or math was a subject she had really enjoyed perhaps because then I would feel that I had challenged her in some way and that she had come away with a deeper understanding and/or love of the subject. What she had liked best, however, was staying in with me. At first her answer disappointed me. I felt I had failed to meet her needs in the language arts area because she had not indicated it was her favorite subject. Upon reflection, however, I realized perhaps I had fulfilled a need that was more important to her at the time, although I was not sure what that was.

The second interesting comment seemingly came from nowhere. We had been discussing the disadvantages of the white glue containers we were using and while I was explaining how the opening was made so the glue would not come out in blobs she quipped, Molly: . This is the great mystery of them all.

Me: What?

Molly: How do people get so smart?

Me: How do people get so smart? Well. What do you think? Did you think about that before?

Molly: Well. First, the teachers teach their kids. Teach kids.

Me: Yes.

Molly: But how do the teachers get so smart? That s the problem.

Me: Do you think you re born being smart or not?

Molly: But there are so many teachers in the world.

Me: How do teachers get smart? Well, how did you get smart?

Molly: I don t know. It just comes to my brain. Maybe it just comes automatically like that.

Me: You didn t do anything and it just came to you?

Molly: Ummhmm.

Me: You told me you were reading a lot.

Molly: Yea. Sometimes I read to get information but ..

Me: When people are smart, what does that mean to you? What can they do?

Molly: Well. Actually, when I think they re smart I think they re kind when they re smart. They re nice when they re smart.

Me: And when they re not nice then they re not smart?

Molly: Yea.

Me: So in order to be smart you have to be kind.

Molly: Maybe, yep (RR June/02)

This is but one example of the philosophical wonderings that Molly engaged in during her first full year of school. According to Terassier (1985), gifted children are concerned at a very early age about what he calls the problem of limits — that is, limits of life such as birth, death, God and the universe. He feels that this tendency to precocious philosophy, when expressed as early as three or four years old, contributes to an already problematic situation where the parents do not understand their child and the child realizes that others do not understand them either. Terassier (1985) stated that the child is left with two alternatives — renounce their giftedness and remain loyal to the family or select intellectual development with its concomitant feelings of guilt. I wonder which path Molly will choose.

Hindsight is always a wonderful thing when you think of where the conversation could have gone and how much more a person could have learned about the other had the right questions been asked. However, it is interesting to note that Molly did not make the connection between book learning and life experiences and aptitude but only questioned whether it was innate or not. The session ended with a discussion of the weather. Molly indicated that she watched the news a lot and that sometimes she even watch[ed] it on purpose. When I asked what she learned from the news she spoke about the changing weather (although she said she did not understand what the H s and L s meant). I asked if she listened and understood the rest of the news and what was going on in the world, she said yes but immediately expressed her confusion over the presentation of the traffic report — the pictures are all weird and they look like scribbly (sic). Since Molly never spoke of current events I had the feeling that although the news could be on television, she was not necessarily paying attention to it. It could also be another example of how she wanted to please me — saying that she followed the news. It was evident at the end of the session that she did not want to leave. She looked around, eyed the clock, mentioned that there wasn t very much time left and suddenly said, well, I also enjoy many other adult shows, too. Like, well . this isn t so much of an adult show but it s very old — The Beverly Hillbillies (RR June/02). Watching and understanding the news was an adult activity and perhaps, since she could only comprehend some of it, she decided to share that she also enjoyed this old adult type show. Or perhaps she thought I was old enough to have remembered the show and might have enjoyed it myself? Was she still trying to please me?

Chapter Five

Gifted girls are told that they can accomplish anything they choose, but they are not told that they may have to do it all alone (Calic-Newman, 2003, p. 397).

Data Presentation and Discussion — Grade Two

Molly s story continues as she entered grade two. I was no longer her teacher but entered the grade two classroom with her as a participant observer to watch her progress in reading in French and English. I was filled with excitement and wonderings. Does she continue to engage in lots of reading? Will she acquire more sophisticated reading strategies? Will she continue to cultivate her reading independence? I spent two half days a week, from September to June, in Betty and Susan s grade two classroom observing Molly during English language arts.

As I began looking through the data, I felt confident that I could write Molly s story by discussing my findings in three time frames — fall, winter and spring. The longer I studied the data, however, the more uneasy I became for I realized that the chunking of time and of Molly s school experiences would not give the reader a sense of the moments unfolding, of slow change, nor would it give a sense of what I suspected was happening to Molly in grade two. I struggled with how best to present the data and, at the same time, how to reflect my emotions because the story was turning out to be a sad one. I felt I was witnessing the slow extinguishing of a bright flame. In the end, I decided that I would continue to present the data month-by-month so what might otherwise be chaotic, shapeless events can be transformed into a coherent whole [story], saturated with meaning (Rosen, 1988, p. 164). The chapter begins then, in September, with a discussion about my changing role, followed by a description of the classroom, which is undertaken to provide an understanding of the learning environment in which Molly was to spend the next year. For each month, as in grade one, I continue to elucidate events and conversations, and show written work that affords a glimpse of Molly s world in grade two.

September

My changing role. My first day of observations and I arrived late. Trying to be inconspicuous, I quickly made my way to a small table at the back of the classroom and sat in one of the small chairs made for small children. Although my entrance had not gone unnoticed (it received a cursory glance by most students) amid the hustle and bustle and noise in the classroom, it did not disturb the flow of events. Betty introduced me to the children and said that I would be visiting often. Many former students waved hello and Molly sat looking at me with a big grin and a knowing look. She knew my reason for being there and it was our little secret. I sat at the small table all morning watching, listening and writing. I was not sure what to observe, what to write, or what my role in the classroom was, although Betty and I had briefly discussed it before school began. It was the typical researchers dilemma, aptly described by Boostrom (1994): If they look too narrowly, they will see little and may learn nothing from the environment they study, having limited their results to the questions they posed. If, on the other hand, they do not attempt to limit their focus, they may see too much and still learn nothing, becoming swamped by an ocean of details (p. 52). It took awhile to learn what to look for. This was Betty s first year teaching grade two, her first year teaching from the new English program the school bought (*Cornerstones*) and her second year as an administrator. She shared the classroom with Susan, a seasoned grade two teacher.

Two things struck me on that first day — the noise and the amount of stuff on the walls, floors, counters, and shelves — it seemed that every available space, not taken up by a student or desk, was in use. Looking around, I wondered how I was going to make it through the year. I found the classroom noisy and cluttered. The classroom condition made me feel tense, irritable and I had trouble focusing my thoughts. I believed that if I could feel like that so could the students. Although I recognized that I had difficulty functioning well in such an environment, I knew that I needed to find a way to work within Betty s and Susan s classroom so that I would be able to focus on Molly and not on the stuff . In order to see what I had to pay attention to I needed to become a highly subjective maker of meaning, with eyes to see and ears to hear . I had to yield to the moral dimension in order to see it (Boostrom, 1994, p. 63). By the end of three hours I had a headache and was anxious to retreat to a quieter place.

While writing my field notes later that evening, I realized that most of my thoughts kept drifting to what I would change in the classroom; about the different student organizational and discipline attempts that Betty made that I knew, through experience, would not work. I wondered if I should say something the next time, offer assistance or suggestions. I wondered if this was a part of my new role or if it was even my place? I was behaving, as Boostrom (1994) put it, like an observer as evaluator. I reminded myself that I was not in the classroom to judge the teacher and assumed that maybe my attitude was interfering with my ability to understand what was trying to be accomplished. The first month of participant observation was not easy — it was filled with many questions and nagging thoughts that I did not share with Betty or Susan. It was difficult to separate the roles of teacher and participant observer. Was it even possible or necessary? I felt it was necessary but not always possible, especially when Betty asked for my help and advice, time and again, in dealing with curriculum, class management and other pedagogical issues. How much help to give? How much advice to offer? How could I avoid a role conflict? These dilemmas surfaced a number of times throughout the year and are dealt with in the findings as they emerge.

While I struggled to find and feel comfortable with my new role as participant observer, Betty was struggling with her role as a teacher of young children. I came to accept that it was okay not to have control over the classroom and realized that my presence as participant observer affected how events played out and how we all behaved. We were all living and telling our stories. I affected the environment and the participants affected me — it was a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as I made my notes and as the research progressed (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). By virtue of being involved in some of the classroom events, I was gaining valuable insights and developing interpersonal relationships but there was also the risk of experiencing role conflicts and emotional involvement (Borg & Gall, 1989). I understood that the way each individual tells his or her own story not only depends upon the purposes and intentions he or she has at the time, but is also dependent upon how the individual is making sense of the researcher s intentions and purposes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 420). Because Molly tried so hard to please, I knew that during my observations of her and when we worked together it would be important for me to remember to listen and look for what was being said as well as what was not being said. I needed to overcome years of selective inattention, tuning out, not seeing and not hearing certain aspects of student and classroom life (Spradley, 1980, p. 55).

The classroom. Molly s grade two classroom was in a portable with one small window that faced west. Other than the furniture, most of the material in the classroom belonged to Susan. Betty carved out a space for herself by claiming a portion of the back counter and by appropriating two of the five bulletin boards that were found along the back and west walls. From the doorway, located in the northeast corner of the room, I noticed the two whiteboards on the north wall (the front of the classroom) and a long, hanging metal book holder, attached to the wall below the whiteboards, holding haphazardly placed French and English dictionaries. In the northwest corner of the room there was a small table for religion, a small wooden step where Betty would sit while reading a story, a free standing flipchart and a reading area. The reading area was delineated by large colorful rubber puzzle pieces that fit together to form a sitting area of about 8 x 10 feet. There were two orange bookshelves along the west side of this sitting space that were filled with math manipulatives and other easily accessible items. A long table with three chairs was situated along the southern end of the area, upon which stood a cassette recorder and two headphones. Behind this table and again along the west wall was another metal shelving unit and a smaller table with two chairs that was more of a storage space than a working area.

Along the south wall (the back of the classroom) was a long counter, spanning the full length of the wall, with a multitude of shelves beneath it, all crammed with science materials, old anthologies, piles of old workbooks, photocopied materials, and dust bunnies. There were also many items on the back counter - several containers of scribblers of different subjects; art material, the children s snacks, some lunch kits, books that had fallen off the book cart, and a host of other items. In the southwest corner, in front of the back counter stood the class library - a wheeled book cart with two shelves on either side, each shelf piled pell-mell with books. One side contained English books and the other side French books. Not only was it difficult to see the book covers it was also difficult to keep the books in relatively good condition because they were packed so tightly in a small space. Consequently, books were often found on the floor, on top of other books on the cart or on any flat surface around the book cart. This was not a user-friendly system especially for struggling readers or advanced readers like Molly. I was aware that struggling readers would likely become frustrated trying to find a book at thier level and consequently would probably end up abandoning the attempt.

Betty and Susan shared the desk that was located in the southeast corner of the classroom alongside a filing cabinet and another metal bookcase. The computer desk, where I sat and typed my observations, was located along the southeastern wall in between yet another filing cabinet and the recycling center. It was sometimes difficult to move the chair back and sit at the small computer table because of boxes or small chairs that had been pushed against a wall and out of the way. The newly purchased word wall words and colorful borders that Betty put on the two bulletin boards were in stark contrast to the faded posters and visual aids that adorned the rest of the room. I wondered how effective the numerous items on display were as learning aids. Did the students ever really look at them? Susan and Betty had an active, talkative class of 27 students, two identified as gifted and six identified as having behavioral and/or learning problems. I wondered how the gifted students and the students with behavioral problems would affect the dynamics, atmosphere and learning potential of the class.

Observations. I noticed, on my first day of observing Molly, that she was still looking for attention. While the students were seated in the reading area, Betty explained that in order for them to get to know one another, they would go around one by one stating their name and something they liked to do. Betty started off by stating her name and announcing that she liked to read and her favorite food was spaghetti. Other children followed suit until it was one little boy s turn. He hesitated and stumbled when attempting to introduce himself. Molly looked at him incredulously and said, You forgot your NAME? Although most children found this amusing and laughed, the little boy in question did not. It seemed that she still needed to be the center of attention — only this time it was at someone else s expense. When it was her turn to introduce herself, she repeated verbatim what Betty had said. Of course the part about the love of reading was true but I remember she loved seafood not spaghetti. Was she just trying to please Betty or had her culinary tastes changed over the summer?

Her French teacher, Susan, informed me that they went through a similar exercise in French class but this time the students were asked to talk about their family. Molly told the other students how much she loved speaking French and that she was also good at it. However, during her discourse (in French) about her family she referred to her stepfather as p re-marche which confused Susan until she realized that Molly had used a literal translation of step and father and created a new French word. Molly s demeanor was quite serious throughout and Susan had a hard time keeping a straight face. Molly was proud to speak French and was neither afraid nor embarrassed to show it. This creation of a new word shows that Molly formulated principles and generalizations through transfer of learning across languages and that she reflected and reasoned to generate solutions, which is consistent with the characteristics of gifted children (Freeman, 1985).

During the getting to know one another time it was also heartwarming to hear that Molly liked school and liked meeting new friends and teachers. One student brought pictures of the animals and birds she had seen that summer and shared them with the class. Molly tried to ask the student a number of questions but they were never answered. During the ensuing discussion, I noticed that Molly had her hand up for some time and then began to grimace because it was taking too long to get to her. This phenomenon was to become a common occurrence. Later, while I watched her work, Molly shared some further thoughts with me: I like school , she said, but I notice there are only 2 man (sic) teachers in the school and I wonder why? (FN, Sept 9/02). That s a good question, I replied, I also wonder why because I think you kids are so much fun. (FN, Sept 9/02). She agreed it was a good question and responded that her dad had taught her that men liked teaching older children. She never inquired further and seemed to accept what her father had told her.

Betty s English language arts routine was, for the most part, as follows:

- Silent reading (10-15 minutes)
- Story time in the reading area — Betty reads (10 -15 minutes depending on the ensuing discussion, alternating between English and French stories)
- Spelling (new words for the week on Mondays, test on Fridays) (5-10 minutes)
- Reading a story or poem from the Cornerstones Anthology with an accompanying worksheet or activity (1 hour or more)
- Word work (for example - making/breaking words, chanting, clapping syllables, practicing word wall words, mini grammar lessons) (15-20

minutes)

- Journal entries (20 minutes)
- Time to copy homework assignments in their agendas

Except for the occasional cultural activity in the gym such as French plays, environmental or musical productions, and weekly trip to the computer lab, this was the routine I observed during English language arts. Other interesting classroom rituals were the different reward systems that were implemented at various times throughout the year. In September, the children received congratulatory notes when they came in on time from recess, groups received stars for being good listeners, and students needed to fill in a checklist everyday (for example, having your shoes on, bringing into class what was needed from your locker, returning the Friday envelope) and if they attained a certain number of checkmarks by the end of the week they were given a treat. Although Molly followed these rules and received the concomitant rewards, she began to experience negative feedback for some of her new classroom behaviors.

Most of the behaviors took place during waiting times — waiting for other students to finish an exercise, waiting for Betty to finish explaining a lesson, waiting to be called upon when her hand was raised, or waiting for others to finish speaking. As a participant observer I was amazed at the types of behaviors I noticed versus what I had noticed as a homeroom teacher. Molly s impatience with peers, hair chewing, playing with items in her desk, licking her fingers, constant fidgeting and different ways of sitting in her desk, were just some of the activities I noticed. In Molly s case, I believed that the behaviors were in response to boredom.

During a story session on the carpet I noticed that Molly had her hand up for quite some time. Betty also noticed but continued reading. Molly did not seem to realize that Betty did not want to interrupt the story, so a friend, who was sitting beside her, put her hand down and shook her head indicating it was not the time to be asking questions or sharing. Later, while Betty explained how to alphabetize their names (they each created a card with their name on it), I noticed that Molly was sitting with her feet on her chair, slouching over her desk. While listening, she was playing with her homemade bracelet, which Betty had asked her to put away earlier because it was breaking. Instead of putting it away, Molly ended up cutting off some pieces and playing with them during the lesson. When the class started to alphabetize the names on the board, Molly was asked which name would go first. She answered correctly and was then asked to explain her answer. However, since she did not know the rule she replied that it was because the student s name was first on the board. Betty quickly retorted that this was not a popularity contest and went on to explain the rule to the class. After this comment, Molly sat silently, playing with an item in her desk. Teacher behaviors and attitudes are crucial in promoting (or inhibiting) learning and humiliation of a student as, perhaps, a form of control, inhibits the students growth of self-respect, which results in high levels of anxiety, conformism, and destructive behavior (Clark, 1997). It was only the first month of the school year and I was already apprehensive about some of Molly s reactions and behaviors in class.

The 27 students were seated in pairs (with one group of three) and they were seated in rows. During September Molly sat beside an active boy who had difficulty organizing himself and staying on task. They had been together in grade one, so she knew his habits and tended to ignore them. Although they seemed to get along quite well, both had tempers and stubborn streaks over social justice and fairness issues that surfaced from time to time. Molly considered him one of her male friends, although she did not always approve of his behavior and often wondered why he said or did certain things. I did not see her gravitate to one particular girl friend during this first month. She was friendly towards everyone, perhaps seeking someone who would accept her.

In one group activity, the students were asked to work in pairs to make up a code for the letters of the alphabet. Betty then asked them to compose a message; put it into the code they had devised, and give it to their partner who was to try to decode the message. Molly enjoyed the challenge of decoding her partner s message and was successful. When it came time for Molly s message to be decoded, however, things did not go as smoothly. Molly s partner did not feel like putting the effort into decoding Molly s message. While circulating, Betty encouraged Molly s partner by saying each person needed to try — at the very least. Reluctantly, Molly s partner guessed the code and said a message just to be done with the exercise. Molly was not impressed with her lack of effort and tried to reason with her. Molly pointed out that a particular symbol (pointing to it on her page) was an s and therefore it could not be the word she had said because the word in her message did not start with an s . Molly also pointed out that another word she had said did not match the symbols on her page because the number of letters did not match. Unfortunately, Molly was left feeling frustrated because shortly after this exchange, Betty asked the class to put away their messages. It was time to read from the anthology. Friendships, it seemed, did not come easy to Molly in this first month of grade two.

Molly found it difficult to find peers who had the same motivation and interests as she did. Although she tried to use the strategies of explanation and reasoning when conflicts occurred in her attempts at forming friendships, most students were not interested or could not keep up with her intellectually. The differences in play interests, mental age and social understandings between her and her classmates were factors that impeded her search for friends at school (Robinson & Noble, 1987).

Molly continued to share stories about her family during classroom discussions — when appropriate. I recall one occasion when she proudly related how her dad fixed their home computer after she had accidentally hit the X button (upon further questioning I understood that the warning message with the bomb symbol had come up on her computer screen and she had pressed the X button thinking it meant no — she indicated that she did not want the computer to explode). She continued her story by sharing that her mother was also very proficient with the computer and would have continued sharing her thoughts had

Betty who said that it was someone else s turn to speak, not interrupted her. This too would become a common occurrence for Molly in the coming months.

Molly s love of reading had not diminished over the summer months. She loved story time on the carpet, whether the story was in French or English, and sat attentively, fully engaged in the reading. Her facial expressions, body movements and soft cries often reflected her connection with the story. Pride in her reading accomplishments was also evident in her eagerness to show me her home reading log, where she had filled in one page of book titles that she had read in one day. Suspecting that perhaps the teacher would not believe Molly was capable of such voracious reading, her mother wrote a note in the margin stating that she had in fact read all the books listed and then qualified it by stating that Molly had been reading since she was four years old and read fast.

As in grade one, Molly continued to connect aspects of the readings to her life experiences. During one poetry reading in English Language Arts, she shared with the class that the picture of a fountain pen that accompanied the poem reminded her of the field trip she had gone on with her grade one class to the Little White School House, where the students experienced a little about school life in the early 20th century. The students sit in old-fashioned desks, listened to a rather severe looking, period-dressed teacher who informed them of the classroom rules of the time and had them write notes using the quill and ink pots that were a part of each desk. Although I knew that several other children in the class had also been on this field trip, only Molly voiced a connection.

Her propensity to read quickly without paying much attention to letter detail — the same phenomenon I observed in grade one - also surfaced early in grade two when she showed me her snack of skunky fruit . I was puzzled as to what this new snack might be and asked to see it. Amused, I replied, Ah, yes. Sunkist Fruit. Those are very good (FN, September 30, 2002). Molly s love of reading had not diminished nor had her preferred reading material changed. Science books and other information type books still topped her list. Reading for pleasure, for escape, for vicarious experiences, did not seem to interest her yet. Although I was seeing familiar behaviors in reading, such as reading quickly and glossing over unknown words, I noticed new behaviors in the area of writing.

Most of the writing I observed in September was in the form of journal entries or worksheets. Molly seemed more interested in the writing process and began noticing different details. Are small letters as wide as capital letters? was one question she asked. In an effort to spell words while writing in her journal, she would talk to herself, saying the letters out loud in an attempt perhaps, to visualize the word. This strategy was met with admonition from Betty and a reminder that it was quiet time. I then noticed her mouthing the letters quietly to herself. Molly also showed more interest in using the dictionary when she wrote in her journal.

An incident in late September, during a writing exercise, left me feeling that she was growing as a learner but wondering whether her reaction had been one of boredom, or impatience, or both. It began when Betty asked the class to write in their journals. There were always a number of children who had difficulty coming up with something to write about, so Betty offered to write some story starters on the board for those who needed ideas. It was quiet as she wrote and as the children began writing and reflecting. It was at this time that Molly got up to get a dictionary that was on a metal shelf, attached to the wall, under the front board. Molly rarely used story starters and had undoubtedly already decided what to write about when she went to retrieve the dictionary. Seemingly annoyed that Molly was out of her seat, Betty asked what she was doing. Molly replied that she needed a dictionary to which Betty remarked, It s a French dictionary . Without hesitation, Molly took a dictionary and proceeded to her desk informing Betty that it was both French and English — which it was.

Interestingly, as I observed her from my computer, her behavior indicated that she did not know how to use a dictionary. She flipped aimlessly through the pages until I went and asked her if she was looking for a specific word and if she knew how to find it. She replied that yes, she was looking for a word but did not know how to find it and I gave her a mini-lesson on the topic. I wondered how long she would have sat looking through the dictionary and I wondered why she did not ask for help. Perhaps Molly wanted to appear as a mature learner, one who knew how to use a dictionary or perhaps she was reluctant to ask for assistance. I suspect she would have sat there for some time looking through this particular pictorial dictionary since she would be satisfying her thirst for knowledge. Molly did not write a lot in her journal. She normally started mid-way on the page leaving plenty of space for an accompanying picture. Two to three sentences were her maximum, compared with the two pages double-spaced that her neighbor regularly wrote and which she was impressed by. Molly s accompanying drawings were reminiscent of last year s art — people with disproportionately huge hands and darkly scribbled sky and background.

Testing results. Near the end of September and early in October, I administered several tests and surveys to Molly. Oral and silent reading comprehension tests and a listening comprehension test from the *Qualitative Reading Inventory II — QR II*(Leslie & Caldwell, 1995) - an informal reading inventory designed to assess reading ability at emergent through middle school levels - was given. Comprehension in this assessment is measured through story retelling and comprehension questions (which are separated into explicit and implicit information about the story). A prior knowledge test is given to assess the child's prior knowledge in the subject area, before comprehension tests are given. I also administered the *Denver Writing Attitude Survey* (Davis & Rhodes, 1991) and the *Elementary Reading Attitude Surv*ey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) to gauge Molly s feelings about reading and writing; and the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test — Third Edition (PPVT-III)* (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) to determine the developmental level of her vocabulary.

Molly s least favorite tests were the reading comprehension passages, especially the listening comprehension test because she was not reading — she was not in control. We usually started our testing sessions with these assessments just to get them over with. Her pace was quick, her answers were always short and to the point — it was rare for her to go off on a tangent about a related topic or event. I got the feeling she did not want to linger a moment longer than was necessary to complete the task. Although Molly normally answered the comprehension questions well enough, her retelling of the passages was usually sketchy at best. Nonetheless, Molly read level four texts at instructional levels for the oral and silent reading tests, reading both narrative and expository passages. For the listening comprehension test, she scored at a level six without any problems. Administering the reading and writing surveys provided me with insights into her habits, interests and attitudes about these domains. The open-ended formats made it easy for Molly to offer explanations, clarifications, and elaborations without prompting, about the questions being answered. The results of the reading survey indicated no difference in attitude towards reading for academic or recreational purposes. She liked both equally well. The writing attitude survey provided an indication of Molly s engagement in reading activities, her perception of the importance and utility of reading and her self-confidence as a reader. Molly believed herself to be an average writer who felt proud of what she wrote. She thought she was good at putting her ideas on paper and believed other people liked what she wrote. Although she felt writing helped her think about what she learned, she did not feel it helped her think more clearly. Molly hardly ever wrote at home, other than schoolwork, and believed that writing helped her tell others what she had learned, only about half the time. After furiously writing down her comments to the questions, and barely keeping up, I decided I needed to tape future testing sessions so as not to miss important insights.

The *PPVT - III* (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) was to become Molly s favorite test and she always asked if we would be doing it together. Results of this test, at the beginning of grade two, determined that Molly had the expressive vocabulary commensurate of a twelve year old. Betty administered the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test* (MacGinitie et al., 1989) to the class at the end of October and the results showed Molly to be reading at a level corresponding to the beginning of grade three.

October

Observations. During the first week of October, the desks were moved again and Molly found herself at the end of a row — at the back of the classroom. A new reward system, the tally board, was also introduced this month. It was an elaborate reward system whereby groups (in this case, rows) of students could gain points for positive behaviors, including being good listeners. When a team (consisting of three rows) reached a certain number of points, they were allowed to choose from a variety of rewards, including watching part of a pre-selected video or receiving extra computer time.

Molly was not a passive listener. She continued to enjoy story time on the carpet, sometimes singing in response to what was being read and other times responding to questions with histrionics. During the reading of *This is the house that Drac built* (Sierra, 1995), Molly feigned screaming, clutched her knees, then buried her face in her hands and finally laid across the knees of her friends who were seated beside her. Betty used a creepy voice and stopped at one point asking if it was too scary and should she stop. Of course they all yelled no. Betty then told Molly to sit up and not get carried away, although she was not the only student reacting in this way.

Molly rarely sat still. While the class watched a video about bullying, I noticed Molly s face — it belied the degree to which she was involved in the video as she twisted, contorted, frowned and smiled in response to the content. I noticed a restlessness in her behavior - as she went from game to game on the computer during a computer class where they had some free time; as she tried to engage Betty in lengthy conversations when she passed by her desk; when she squirmed in her seat while the class learned about word families; or when the class engaged in choral reading.

Although I often noticed her playing with items in her desk, it never seemed to disturb Betty or the other students. On occasion Betty did notice her lack of attention, however, and took away the item that she had been playing with. On another occasion Molly was chastised for helping a classmate spell a word — they were supposed to go to thier special spelling scribblers for the words they needed. Her methods of attention seeking were also changing from the previous year. She once placed a small stuffed toy dolphin on her head while listening to a story on the carpet and on another occasion was busy writing a poem at her desk with a post-it stuck on her nose. Other behaviors surfaced that I had not seen in grade one. Molly began chewing her hair, sometimes stuffing large chunks into her mouth. When the class engaged in choral reading, Molly often followed silently along, chewing her hair and squirming in her seat or sometimes she would mouth the words silently in an exaggerated fashion. I was the only one who seemed to notice. I wondered if it had been the same when she was in my class. I was able to understand some of these behaviors when she informed me on October 21, that she had already finished reading the English Language Arts anthology. It became apparent she was bored and was searching for ways to occupy herself.

She also spent a lot of class time with her hand up, trying desperately to respond to questions or share stories and ideas. On several occasions she was told not to interrupt or not to talk so loudly or to save what she had to say for later. She continued, however, to grimace if it was taking too long to call upon her and to prop up one hand with the other or to switch hands because they were getting tired from being held up. There were many times when her efforts were futile because another student called out the answer, another child had been called upon or Betty asked the class as a whole to respond. According to Sadker and Sadker (1995), boys call out significantly more often than girls and whether their comments are relevant or not, teachers respond to them. When girls call out, however, teachers suddenly remember the raise your hand rule and the unassertive girl is put in her place. This system of silencing operates covertly and repeatedly, several times a day during each school week for twelve years (Sadker & Sadker, 1995). Approximately seven thousand two hundred incidents of subliminal silencing would have a powerful negative cumulative impact on any person s self-esteem and I was witnessing the beginning of this impact on Molly. She was only in grade two but I worried about her.

Molly continued to show her stubborn streak. Her group lost five points because she needed to go to the washroom during class time. They were irate with her and gave her a hard time upon her return. Molly ended up complaining loudly enough so that Betty had to intercede and remind all of them that sometimes these things happened and they needed to be patient with one another. When Molly was upset, as in this case, she would screw up her face, furrow her eyebrows, purse her lips, cross her arms and glare — and she would not back down nor apologize. She could also be stubborn with Betty as was exhibited one afternoon when Betty wanted to continue reading a story she had started but Molly insisted several times that she had not read that story to the class from the beginning. After Betty summarized the story for her, Molly remembered Betty had read it aloud that morning. The students then began reading the story chorally, except Molly. She chewed her hair and stared at the book. Betty stopped and reminded them she wanted to hear everyone reading aloud and Molly complied by mouthing the words in an exaggerated fashion.

I noted that during group work Molly had a strong personality and was somewhat non-conformist. Her group would usually go through a lengthy discussion (with her leading it) to see who would go first, although on more than one occasion it came down to the eenie, meenie, minee, moe strategy. Over the course of the month, I watched her during several group exercises and observed that she became impatient with members of her group when they did not comprehend or know something she thought everyone should know. She would get impatient if they did not take their task seriously or if they were not participating. After the exercise was complete Molly would promptly go back to her desk, seemingly untouched by what they had shared or learned together. I often wondered whether these exercises were beneficial to her learning or a complete waste of time for her.

I also noted that when she was reading in French, Molly engaged in the same kinds of reading behavior as in grade one. During one silent reading session we went together to read French books on the carpet. Molly began by reading *Je suis capable (I can)*, which she did not find difficult although not all of the words were pronounced correctly. The next book she chose was a little more difficult — *Un nouveau-n , a ne fait rien (A newborn can t do anything).* She read the title hesitatingly, skipping the word *n* in *nouveau-n* , while looking carefully at the picture of the baby on the cover. I waited to see if she would distinguish between the words baby and newborn from the context but it was evident by the middle of the book that she had not. I asked her if she knew the meaning of the word *nouveau-n* . She shook her head and mentioned she found reading aloud difficult — in either language. When I read out loud it s too hard. When I read to myself it s easier and I go faster (FN, Oct 24/02). When she encountered a difficult word during the readings, she either skipped it, tried to pronounce it and whether it was pronounced correctly or not or whether it made sense or not, she continued on. Molly never stopped to question pronunciation or meaning and I assumed she was trying to ascertain the latter from the context. She read three more books during this session, most of which were easy. The last one, *Les requins (Sharks)*, was difficult but since it was a topic that interested her she could pick up on the content from her background knowledge.

In writing, Molly continued to ask about the spelling of words and listened attentively in class during discussions of spelling strategies. She was one of a small group of students who wrote sentences rather than a list of words during spelling tests. I noted when Betty reviewed the words at the end of the test, Molly would repeat them softly and follow her text with her finger, making corrections if necessary. The class was given incentives to check their spelling before handing in their work and sometimes Molly half-heartedly complied. It seemed that incentives such as pencil erasers were not enough to motivate Molly.

Molly s reading interests narrowed about this time, due in large part I believe, to peer pressure. I was listening to a group of students (Molly among them) list the items they would buy if they found a great treasure. After Molly shared she would buy tons and tons of snakes, lizards, cats and dogs , I joked she was the lizard lady and knew a great deal about reptiles. She stuck out her tongue like a lizard while the rest of the group groaned and made faces saying snakes and lizards were disgusting. I was immediately sorry I made such an insensitive remark and horrified I might have embarrassed her in front of her friends. Shortly after this episode she came to see me at my computer station and informed me she thought she now liked cats more than snakes. I wondered then and I still wonder whether the reaction of her peers, fueled by my thoughtless comment, influenced this change of interests. Cats continued to be her focus in reading until grade four.

November

Observations. The children were seated in groups of two this month and Molly was beside an academically strong female student who had been in her grade one class. Another reward system for positive behavior was also explained to the students. In this system, the students collected small building blocks when exhibiting proper behavior. The system was short-lived, however, because blocks were continually lost or stolen. Betty often talked over the noise in the classroom, over the continuous movement and talking of students. The noise in the classroom may have been the result of classroom dynamics and the type of exercises the children were asked to engage in. With this class, any type of whole class oral exercise started out with some children answering as requested, others emitting little screeches just to be heard, waving items in the air and more often than not the exercise ended in a cacophony of voices that was difficult to get back under control. Betty s frustration with classroom management began to surface. Comments such as I can t do this anymore and No talking, just do it , sending students out in the hallway, as well as curt answers to students questions suggested that she felt overwhelmed with the demands of a grade two classroom.

The sense of frustration Betty felt was also revealed in other ways. Molly tried several times this month to share her thoughts with Betty. She tried, for example, to share her enthusiasm for the series of books called *Magic*

Treehouse, but was dismissed with Not now, Molly or Please go to your desk and start your work . Molly tried sharing answers during group discussions by raising her hand and using body language to indicate she wanted to be chosen but she either got no response from Betty or was not picked to answer. Betty was frustrated when students did not follow directions. The class read a poem (taken from their anthology) that had been copied on a large white sheet of paper and placed in front of the class. Molly could not see the words and decided to open her anthology and follow along but Betty told her to put her book away and follow along from the sheet. When she tried to explain that she could not see, she was told to move her desk sideways and look between two other students.

I noticed that Molly began licking the palm of her hands and licking or sucking on her fingers while waiting to be called upon or while listening to instructions. This was a new behavior, which I again attributed to boredom, since it usually transpired during times when she seemed to be grasping for a thread of newness in what was being presented. There continued to be times when Molly seemed invisible to everyone but me. I watched her brush her hair while Betty asked comprehension questions on a story they had read and then hang over the front of her desk waiting for the exercise to be over.

In reading, it seemed inappropriate and unfair that Molly be required to go along with the group (partaking in choral reading and completion of worksheets) rather than develop her reading skills. I agree with Freeman (1985) who wrote, worksheets are a boring, soul-destroying sampling of school life (p. 15) and although I believe choral reading has its place in the annals of reading strategies, it seemed stifling in the language arts experience of a gifted student. When Molly participated in choral reading she was one of the loudest, setting a quick pace and zooming through the text like a bullet train.

During story time on the carpet, Molly continued to engage in whatever story Betty read. If Betty read a word Molly did not understand she would burst out — What does it mean? She was often the only one laughing at certain parts of a story, likely reflecting the well developed sense of humor characteristic of gifted children (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990). During one such occasion she laughed rather loudly and the student in front of her turned and gave her a stern, annoyed look. Molly immediately retorted, It was funny . The student did not comment and merely turned around. The story Betty read was about a farmer who was chased to the city by the animals on his farm because he had been mean to a duck. Betty asked the class if they thought it was fair of the animals to chase the farmer to the city. Most students felt the animals had a right to take that action. Molly s comment on the issue of justice in this story was, It s not good to do something bad to people. Just because the farmer was mean to the duck it (sic) doesn t mean that the animals should be mean to the farmer. I don t like books that get revenge. I think it s inappropriate (FN Nov 25/02).

In writing, Molly was excited at the prospect of making up her own Minerva Louise story, copying the format of the one the class had just read. She reminded me of all the booklets, pop-up and other kinds, she made in grade one and looked forward to reliving the experience. She voiced her disappointment however, when the exercise turned out to be a cut and paste retelling of the story. Later, the class shared their stories in groups. Molly was the last to share in her group and unfortunately the class was called back to their desks to start a new subject. Although the members of Molly s group were on their way to their desks, Molly kept reading her story, though no one was listening. When she finally returned to her seat she joined the class in neatly printing new word wall words, boxing them and then clapping out the letters. Later, Betty told me that Molly had not done what was asked in the Minerva Louise story exercise. I wondered why she never questioned Molly s motives for straying from the expected outcome. I had questions concerning Molly s school experiences and was anxious to meet with her parents and find out if they had noticed any differences in her reading behavior since last year and how she was doing so far in grade two.

Interview #2 — Family #2. Near the beginning of November I met with Molly s mother, Jessica, for an informal conversation on her perceptions of Molly s progress in grade two. The atmosphere was relaxed and we spoke for about an hour. She began the conversation by saying she was concerned about Molly s spelling. She had seen children s work displayed on the bulletin boards outside the classroom and compared Molly s work to that of the other children.

I kind of notice that her writing [is] worse, actually, than it was before but she still have (sic) the drive . But at the same time I think she s starting to be at the same level as other kids too .that other kids are starting to catch up to her. That s the impression I get (INT #2, November 10/02). She did not see evidence that Molly s writing was superior to the other students and reluctantly came to the conclusion that her giftedness had perhaps expired . Although she felt it was normal to make a few spelling errors, she had trouble reconciling that other children s work contained no spelling errors and Molly s contained many. Jessica indicated Molly had a dictionary at home and would use it on occasion but preferred to ask whoever was nearest for the spelling. She also spoke to her daughter about visualizing a word she did not know how to spell: You wrote so many books; you read so many books. When there is a word, close your eyes and visualize it like you re reading it and then you ll know how it s spelled . (INT #2, November 10/02). Jessica was not sure if this worked for her but I shared that Molly regularly checked to see if a word looked right and that she sometimes closed her eyes to see the word she was trying to spell. Jessica was also concerned about Molly s messy handwriting (she thought Molly was just being lazy) and they spent time practicing letters at home until Molly declared, I needed some confidence and now I have the confidence and now I know I can do it (INT #2, November 10/02).

Jessica acknowledged that Molly still enjoyed reading about reptiles, snakes and other animals but had also included Pokemon books among her favorites. On occasion Jessica ordered books through the school s Scholastic Book Club; other times they picked some titles together at various bookstores in the city. Jessica favored gathering information from books over gathering information from the Internet because I think that reading is so important that if I show her too much of the Internet maybe she ll get disinterested in books I have this thing about the Internet . I know that times are changing but I m not ready yet for her to go into that too much (INT #2, November 10, 2002). Jessica admitted they did not own a set of encyclopedia and I remembered Molly telling me she had read all the books at her mom s place and that they did not frequent the public library. Although Jessica tried to answer Molly s continual barrage of questions, she admitted it was tiring and sighed, she just talks too much sometimes (INT #2, November 10, 2002).

Jessica may have tired of the constant questioning but she was very proud of her daughter s accomplishments at school as well as her budding personality. She has more confidence. She knows, she believes in herself, she believes in other people to a fault — she trusts people. She s a happy kid (INT #2, November 10, 2002). There were small changes that were pleasing to Jessica: She wants to do a little bit more girlie stuff now. I think now she s hanging (sic) more with little girls at recess than boys all the time I m glad she s not totally tomboy (INT #2, November 10, 2002). Molly was never interested in dolls when she was younger and now only played with Barbies in the bath. Instead, she had an array of stuffed animals (including a giant snake) at the foot of her bed. She had special beds for them, took care of them and talked to them, as she had to her imaginary friend Spiro, in kindergarten. Apparently, this imaginary friend reappeared from time to time and surfaced recently for a short while. Spiro, Jessica explained to me, came from a video game by the same name. Darin and Jessica loved to play adult video games and allowed Molly to play pre-approved children s games. They were vigilant that the games were non-violent and Jessica was especially conscious of games that portrayed violence against women — that s something I m teaching my daughter — that s not to take crap from any man! She stands up for herself already .and she respects other people (INT #2, November 10, 2002). Jessica also talked to Molly about equality: I used to have a little native friend when I was a kid, about seven years old, same as Molly. I used to go to her place and my mom made me stop going because she was native. And that s something I want Molly to [realize] — everybody s the same . everybody s special . (INT #2, November 10, 2002).

According to Jessica, Molly still enjoyed watching Crocodile Hunter on the television and was becoming more interested in watching the news. Jessica and Darin continued to monitor the television programs and the amount of television Molly watched. During our conversation, Jessica mentioned Molly s propensity for drama and how she s such an entertainer! Besides enjoying being in front of the class either dancing or talking, Jessica proudly described her amazing song writing ability. She was sure that Molly would eventually become an entertainer. I know my dad s side is very musical. My brother is a singer and plays the guitar and my other sister and my dad play the piano, the violin and the guitar. So maybe she s got that side in her (INT #2, November 10, 2002).

December

The seating arrangement did not change this month but a new reward system was instituted, this time for returning their journals on Mondays. The groups who brought back their journals and placed them in a special box received 20 points. Molly lost points for her group again this month, this time for kicking snow while in a line up, during a fire drill. There were also further displays of non-conformist behavior. Molly wanted to draw rather than read during silent reading time and argued with Betty for a short while in hopes of getting her way; and although she was told to read only one paragraph of her report in front of the class, she read three, losing the students attention because the material was difficult. When she was in front of an audience nothing else seemed to matter - including whether or not she had their attention.

Molly got glasses! She was very excited about having chosen glasses with the Barbie logo on them and that they came with a pair of glasses for her Barbie doll as well. There is, apparently, an increased likelihood that gifted children will wear glasses (Coleman & Cross, 2001), which would explain why she could not see the poem from the back of the class last month, and attempted to follow along in her anthology instead. I found it surprising that she showed so much enthusiasm over Barbie dolls, considering I had not heard her speak of them before this incident.

At Betty s request, I took Molly and two other children (one was also gifted and the other was an academically strong student) out of the classroom to work on a cranberry research project she found outlined in the language arts teacher s guide. The students were asked to search the Internet for information on the harvesting of cranberries as well as their health benefits. During the two sessions in the computer room, I noticed Molly wanted to include difficult information in her report — information she did not understand herself. While the other children rewrote basic information in their own words, as I had explained, Molly was cutting and pasting paragraphs printed off the Internet. When it was time to practice their presentation, Molly was the only one who did not take the task seriously. While the others read and re-read their pieces, Molly ran around the work area. She assumed that because she was a good reader and had read it over once, quickly, that was all that was required. I suggested to Molly that she only read her first paragraph because the second had some difficult words that most children would not understand. She only had a vague understanding of the concepts herself. Her reply was, I know . I was not able to stay during the actual presentation, but Betty later told me she had read both paragraphs. Betty cut Molly s report short when it became evident she lost the students interest. Molly was not aware that the audience was not with her and she did not seem to care that no one, including herself, understood what she was reading. It was enough to be the center of attention and to be reading something that was beyond the comprehension of her peers. Betty and I were disappointed in her performance but she was oblivious to what had transpired.

Was Molly showing off to gain acceptance or favorable attention? What was her purpose in engaging in this activity? Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) outline two broad goal orientations individuals have for learning — a learning goal orientation and a performance or ego orientation. Those students with a learning goal orientation try to improve their skills by accepting new challenges. Individuals with an ego orientation attempt to outperform others and maximize favorable evaluations of their ability (p. 407). Although Molly seemed to exhibit the ego goal orientation, this could be a reflection of her personality as well as her learning environment.

Betty also informed me that Molly often commented on how special she was. This was, perhaps, not surprising since most teachers tell their students, at one time or another, that they are special. Molly had always felt different from her peers and had been told by friends and family alike that she was special — they did not use the term, gifted. Most gifted students are well aware they are different (Smutny, 1998b). I know she felt this way when I took her out for testing or when we did special projects together and it showed in her walk and in her talk. Although it only lasted a few days, the cranberry project was the first special assignment that she engaged in since the beginning of grade two and she was happy to belong to a group who was doing different work than the rest of the class.

Boredom behaviors continued to surface, however. On two occasions - a choral reading of a poem and after finishing a spelling exercise - Molly managed to extend her body over the top of her desk with her legs straight out over the back of her chair, and stayed in this position for some time. No one appeared to notice, although later I observed someone else briefly in the same position. She continued to squirm in her seat and on occasion simulated farting noises by placing a hand under the opposite armpit. I felt helpless and sad watching her obvious ennui. Betty often mentioned that she was aware Molly was not being challenged and asked me for suggestions. Although I passed Betty some material that I thought was appropriate she never used it. I wondered if it was because it involved organizing centers to provide opportunities for learning and she did not yet feel comfortable enough teaching at this level, to attempt this style of teaching. Instead Betty bought two small booklets that she left on a back table for all the children to use if they had spare time. The *Bright Ideas Calendars* (1991), one for grades one to three and the other for grades four to six, were calendars containing 365 problem solving activities (one for every day of the year) that were supposed to make learning fun and help students improve their problem solving skills. An example of an activity from the grades one to three calendar follows:

> How many eraser lengths wide do you think the blackboard is? How tall do you think it is? (*Write students estimates).* Let s see how well you estimated the measurement of the blackboard. *(Allow students to measure the length and width of the board using an eraser).* (*Bright Ideas Calendar*, Grades 1-3, January 10)

The example below comes from the grades four to six calendar:

> *(Write the following on the board: a=tap, e=step, i=kick, o=hop, u=bump.)* Here are motions for each short vowel sound. When you hear one of these sounds, make the appropriate action. For example, The cat sat would get two taps. Make up your own short vowel sentences and dance away! (*Bright Ideas Calendar*, Grades 4-6, March 6).

The novelty of this center lasted less than a week.

January

The students began the New Year with a substitute teacher. As I observed the classroom behavior disintegrate over the course of the morning, I noticed that Molly also did not feel the need to listen to the substitute, constantly talking and working on assignments at her own pace and time.

Perhaps Molly was still feeling the lull of the recent two week Christmas break, but she did not seem to be as engaged during story time with Betty as in previous months. She chewed her hair (something she had previously done only while sitting at her desk listening to discussions or instructions), sat more often at the back of the reading area playing with items on the surrounding shelves, and began making comments during the readings. During one story Betty read, Molly laughed uproariously and fell over backwards onto the mat. No one else found it quite so amusing. The children ignored her and Betty told her to sit up and calm down. The attention-seeking behavior surfaced again later, during individual presentations. Each student was asked to give an oral presentation on what they received for Christmas and were given a few days to prepare. They were given time limits and a structure to follow. Molly came unprepared but believed she could do a satisfactory job just winging it . It was becoming increasingly evident to me that she did not feel she needed to put effort into her work. I was not sure if she felt indifferent towards her grades, the assignment, or if she felt her superior verbal skills exempted her from having to prepare. Her lack of preparedness, however, did not stem the flow of questions from her peers when she had finished, which pleased her enormously. Her answers were short and interspersed with giggles and exaggerated arm movements. During the remainder of the presentations, I observed Molly being chastised for not listening because she was pulling on the fake fur of her stuffed cat (which she was playing with) but after the presentations she always asked a question and never had to wait to be chosen. The fact that she was chosen to ask a question so often was in stark contrast to what I had witnessed in previous months and I wondered why and if it would continue.

The phenomenon did not continue. Several days later I noticed her stomping her feet and mumbling in an effort to be chosen to answer a question. She was not chosen. On another occasion, during story time on the mats, she tried to ask a question or make a comment but was told that it was not the time. At the conclusion of the story, when students were free to ask questions and otherwise respond, Molly remained quiet with her hands on her lap. According to Morrow and Gambrell (2000), children s responses to read aloud stories, both in questions and comments, are a crucial aspect of the interactive process. The opportunity to question allows all children to learn and it gives some the power to regulate their own learning. The extent to which Molly could regulate her learning in such an environment was a problem I struggled with then and continue to struggle with.

English Language Arts periods continued to follow a predictable pattern: students read a story or poem from the anthology, answered some questions, engaged in a mini grammar lesson on occasion and did an accompanying worksheet. The inch thick duo tang, filled with black line masters (BLMs) the publishers had created for each of the stories, as well as Betty s teaching style seemed reflective of the early twentieth century translation period in the conceptualizations of reading and the reading process. In this conceptualization the meaning was seen to reside in the text and the reader s job was to decode the message that lay in its structure and style. During this time, educators developed skills models of reading comprehension that were bottom-up, sequential models with an emphasis on the acquisition of grammar and phonics skills (Binkley, Phillips & Norris, 1994).

After one particularly long discussion of a story, I noticed Molly laid out on top of her desk with her legs across the back of her chair, again. Boredom behaviors continued to be fed - she pretended to smoke a pencil while the class was engaged in a vocabulary walk-through of a story, talked to her neighbors regularly and twisted a hand cream tube around her lips for an extended period of time. During one transition time, Molly made hissing sounds and spitting motions like a snake. Molly took the initiative sometime in the middle of January and asked Betty if she could go out into the hallway and read to me. Instead, Betty directed her to the Bright Ideas calendar and suggested she choose an activity from there. After flipping through the calendar for some time, Molly chose to write about which of the Three Little Pigs she would like to live with and why. Unfortunately, she never got the chance to start before the class was called to the next activity.

Molly continued to exhibit a sense of humor that often escaped her peers. When Betty asked Molly to write in her agenda that she had a presentation to do the following week, Molly quipped, I have a good memory but it s short! No one laughed. She looked around and told the class it was a joke and then explained, If you have a good memory, it s not short!

Her curiosity had also not waned. Molly indicated that her stepmother said dreams lasted 3 seconds and her mother said they lasted 3 minutes. During a language arts research activity later that day, she used the problem as her research question and filled in the required areas on the research sheet they were given, but never found the answer to the question. Again, I saw that she put very little effort into finding the answer to her query — it was enough perhaps, to have come up with an interesting question that no one was able to answer. Several times over the course of my observations I noticed Molly seek reassurance from Betty that she had done what was asked of her. This was a behavior I had not noticed before and I wondered if she was starting to doubt her abilities in some way. I did not want to jump to conclusions or read into a situation what was not there, but I could not dismiss the unsettling feeling I was beginning to experience.

In French reading she continued to rely on pictures to help her comprehension, she read slower than in English and took long pauses, reflecting on what she had read. I found it intriguing that she could stop her reading at any time, talk about the pictures or a related event or life circumstance and then pick up the story again without losing her place or the thread of the story. Sometimes I asked about the meaning of certain words I thought she might find difficult but instead of answering the question, she talked about words she mispronounced.

Molly tried using her knowledge of English prefixes to decode French words with the same beginning. It did not always work but it showed she was trying all the strategies she knew to help make meaning of the text.

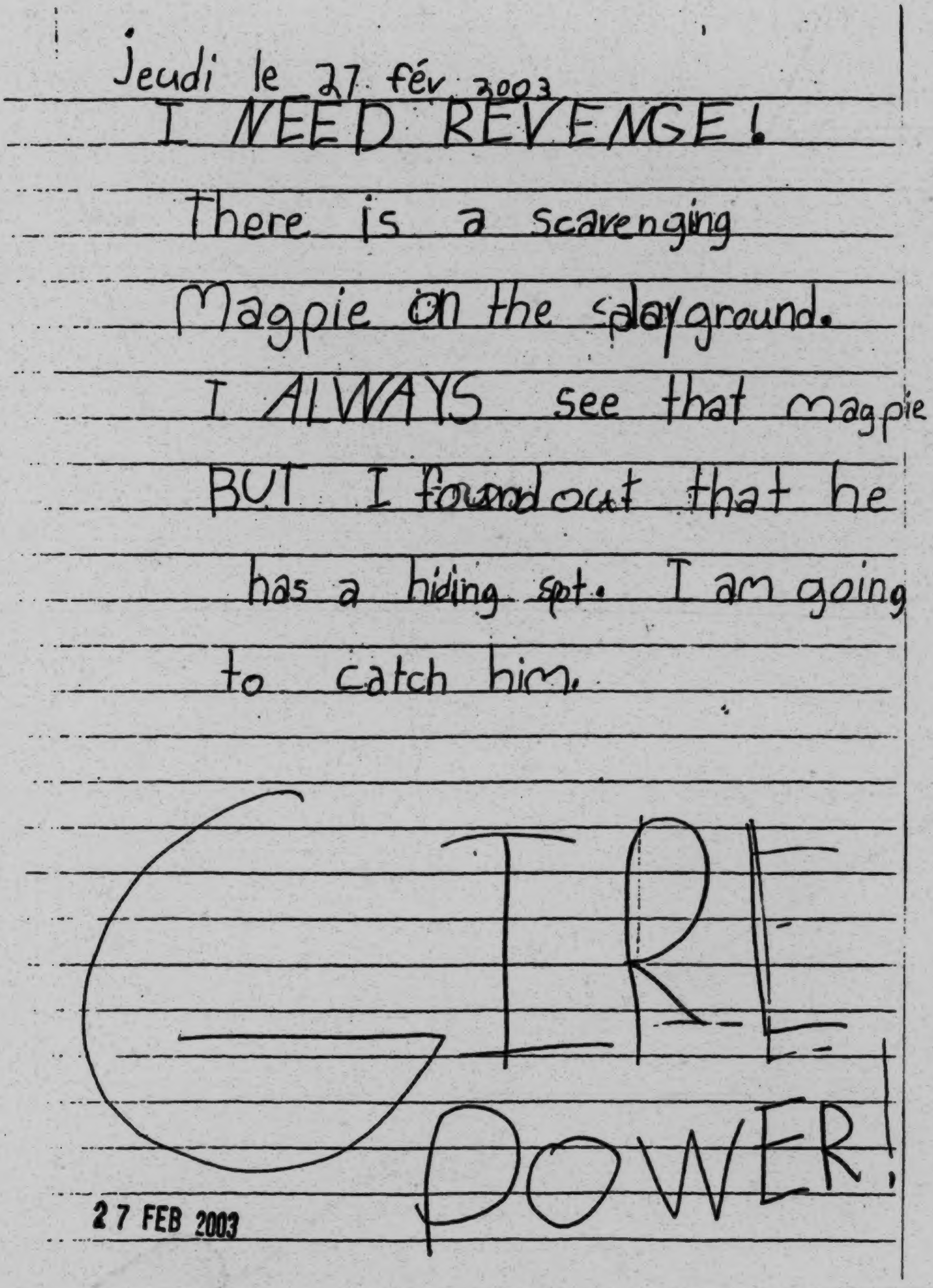
In English, she continued to read quickly, mispronounce some words, guess at meanings of others, and to relate the story read to her lived story. It seemed she did not rely on the picture clues to the same extent as she did when she read in French and by not attending to the details in the text or in the pictures, she missed important events. I do not remember seeing Molly read for a sustained period of time. She read during the snippets of time available to her during the school day — during transition times, before or after morning prayer, while waiting for students to be finished, Betty to be finished, the bell to ring, amidst noise and activity. This month, during class time, she read a *Junie B. Jones* book — It s funny! , the second *Harry Potter*book — It s so good! It s like I m inside the book! (FN, January 29/02) and some very simple French books. The school librarian recounted an amusing incident concerning Molly. During the previous library period Molly had tried to take out an encyclopedia because, as she informed the librarian, that s where I m at right now (FN, January 20/02). We had a good laugh although there is a measure of truth to her declaration.

Molly still did not write much in her daily journal although the entries were always related to what she did or felt. Molly often laughed as she wrote and most of her entries had words written in huge letters, sometimes with a huge exclamation mark at the end (Figure 2). She was still conscious of spelling words correctly and searched for them in other journal entries as well as the dictionary. I was also approached to spell words for her but normally did not give the spelling without some discussion surrounding the word itself. Molly knew a word was spelled correctly by looking at it but could not explain why. During spelling tests she continued to mouth the words, boxed them (i.e $\boxed{\text{boxed}}$) even if she was not asked to and when she was reminded to put her finger on the word as Betty reviewed them, ignored the request. She decided what she wanted to do and how she wanted to do it.

February

Molly now sat in a group of three students, at the front of the class. Her best friend was on one side of her and a student with behavior problems was on the other. This arrangement lasted for less than a week because Molly and her girlfriend did not stop talking. Molly was moved to a new group on the other side of the room. Betty continued to have classroom management issues — there was almost continual talking and movement while she was teaching. At times it seemed she was oblivious to it all and at other times the strain of trying to keep some kind of order resulted in loud admonitions of Hellooo! or Quiet! in an attempt to get their attention. There were days when I found the noise so intolerable I had to leave the classroom.

Figure 2



Jeudi le 27 fév 2003

I NEED REVENGE!

There is a scavenging Magpie on the playground. I ALWAYS see that magpie BUT I found out that he has a hiding spot. I am going to catch him.

GIRL POWER!

27 FEB 2003

An example of Molly's expressive writing.

Betty often talked to me about her lack of skills in the area of classroom management and asked for assistance. I gave her examples of what I would do in certain situations but sometimes felt uncomfortable doing so. It was difficult to juggle my roles as friend, colleague, and participant observer and I never knew to what extent I should help. It was not only the different roles that caused me anxiety but also the difference in our teaching styles and tolerance levels for certain situations. I did not want to unduly influence her teaching but Betty would defer to my suggestions because of my background in literacy and my experience in the lower elementary grades. I wondered how my presence in the classroom affected the expectations she had of herself and of her students. Betty freely admitted she was not doing a great job as a grade two teacher but said she was doing the best she could and worried I was judging her. I tried to reassure her and offer assistance when necessary and talked about how my first few years of teaching grade one had probably not been all that dissimilar to what she was experiencing. Teaching lower elementary students was quite different from teaching upper elementary children or senior high students, where she had received her training.

I realized the extent to which she had problems coping when, on one occasion, Betty suddenly stood up behind her desk and declared, I can t take this anymore! What should I do? and looked at me. She had a long line-up of students at her desk and the rest were wandering around aimlessly, talking and laughing. I suggested she put a list of tasks she wanted them to complete and/or start on the board so they would have some direction. I noticed she used this strategy frequently in the following days.

Story time on the carpet was still an enjoyable time for Molly even though she continued to be distracted by things around her. At various times she brushed her hair while Betty read, was absorbed in a poster, tried to ask a question and was usually the only one who made noises and comments during the readings. Betty related that Molly continued to put objects in her mouth, including her socks! Molly was allowed to read a story to the class during the month and enjoyed the attention enormously, although she had to be told to slow her reading pace.

It was becoming evident that Molly could not sit still and listen. While Betty was reading the book *Matilda* (Dahl, 1988*)* to the class, Molly was busy cutting bits of blue paper. Betty told her now was not the time for that activity, so she took out a supplementary booklet she had in her desk — Reading Creatures — a booklet where students colored different blends and digraphs different colors. Unfortunately she had no wax crayons left - I lost them all - and needed to ask others for the colors she needed. Again she was admonished, this time for disturbing her peers and for constantly interrupting the story. Despite the recurring censures, Molly continued to appear a happy student. She jumped for joy in front of the class, doing a Michael Jackson type dance, when she received permission to make up her own imaginary story based on an outline the students were given. Most days Molly was happy when she wrote in her journal. She hummed silently, paused to reflect or laughed at an image or thought that suddenly came to mind.

Molly was happy but not well-organized. Her desk was messy, her locker was cluttered and she often had difficulty finding her worksheets. Typical of most students her age, a desk would be cleaned and organized when time was given for the task. It would remain in this condition for a few days and then quickly deteriorate into a state of chaos once again. Books about cats and other animals continued to be her preferred reading material and easy, fun French books were the ones chosen from the cart at the back of the room. A fun French book was one with lots of bright pictures and flaps or holes in the pages to reveal parts of the story. The French books were age and grade appropriate and Molly did not seek out any challenging books in her second language. It seemed like too much effort to her.

March/April

The months of March and April passed quickly, with a flurry of evaluations being given in preparation for the second report cards, report card writing, interviews, and a well-deserved Spring Break was followed by Easter holidays. Since there was less time for observation during these two months, I share the observations of both months in the same section.

Story time on the carpet continued to engage Molly. She would lift her shoulders, put a scared look on her face, make accompanying soulful sounds to scary stories, and laugh, screech and display looks of disbelief during other stories. Other times, she sucked on her fingers, her shirtsleeve or her necklace or moved spots on the carpet, all the while listening and making sounds and/or comments. Eyes that used to be fixed on the reader were now more likely to be gazing at and playing with items on the surrounding shelves or secretly glancing through another book and yet she was able to ask and answer questions pertaining to the story. Other students also reacted with ooohs and ahhs to various parts of the story but not as much nor as often as Molly.

The classroom continued to be an active place, with a great deal of movement and noise even while lessons were being taught and Molly continued to seek attention through her behavior. The students were asked to build a model or draw a picture of their dream home (the same dream home they had written about earlier in the month) and to explain 10 details of the home using descriptive language. Before writing this homework in her agenda, Molly asked Betty if she could delete a part of her home. Puzzled, Betty asked her what part and why. She replied that after some reflection she decided she did not want her windows to be made of grasshopper guts, as she had written, because the class might laugh. Betty suggested she re-write that section but Molly did not want to re-write anything, preferring to wing it up front as she had done on numerous other occasions. Nothing more was said on the subject as the bell rang to go home.

The times when I watched Molly write, I noticed she was fully engaged in the process. She talked to herself, laughed to herself, and scolded herself when she made a mistake but she always smiled. Betty still reminded her not to speak the spelling words aloud but it did not seem to have any effect. Coloring did not seem as important as earlier in the year, as she had yet to replace her pencil crayons, preferring to rely on crayon remnants from the lost and found box to do her work. Her coloring was similar to the scribbles I observed in grade one, where little time was taken to make sure the area was covered by color, ignoring the boundaries in the process. It remained, undoubtedly, a boring exercise for her. During one of our conversations, as I roamed the classroom helping students with different aspects of the writing process, Molly commented that she was becoming a proficient speller. I spell much better than grade one (FN, March 2902). When I asked what she was doing now that she did not do before she replied, I m thinking more. I see it in my head, I sound it out, write it, look at it and I know if its spelled right. I m starting to regain my memory. My memory is getting regained (FN March 29/02).

Molly continued to take out science books from the school library, including titles such as *Killer Science! Natures Deadliest Predators* (Silbering, 2000), and *Encyclopedia of Awesome Animals* (Petty & Llewellyn, 1998) but also enjoyed reading the *Jake Drake* series of books. They are realistic fiction, about 80 pages each with approximately one picture per chapter. Jake is an endearing third grader who uses his head to solve typical school based dilemmas such as becoming the teacher's pet accidentally or having to work with the kid who bullied him in second grade (Retrieved March 7, 2005 from http://mitchell.needham.k12.ma.us/media_center/seriesreading2.html). These books may have satisfied Molly s need to learn more about social justice issues in relation to school or she may have just enjoyed the storylines. I noted, however, that the main character was a male and the kinds of experiences that were described in the book may have little resemblance to what girls may experience in the same situation. Molly loved to learn facts but as Silverman (1986) points out:

> Girls trust their ability to learn facts, but they do not trust their interpretive powers, largely because their own interpretations differ widely from those presented in the texts . the interpretive level of any discipline — literature, history, biology, etc. — is oriented toward a masculine viewpoint, one that excludes the experiences of females. This erodes girls confidence in their own perceptions and leaves them feeling that their only chance at success is through imitation of others (p. 70).

Gilligan further supports this viewpoint:

> And because male values are considered the norm, girls begin to see their own experience disappear from the representation of human experience. Girls begin to become aware that bringing in their own values is going to make trouble. So they start waiting and watching for other people to give them their cues as to what their values should be. And of course, the irony is, that since they re very tuned in to other people, they re very good at this (as quoted in Van Gelder, 1984, p. 38).

So far, most of the fiction books that Molly read — the *Harry Potter*series, the *Captain Underpants* series, and the *Pokemon* series of books - have a male as the main character. Only the *Harry Potter* series has a strong female character, Hermione, who is portrayed as intelligent and fearless. There is one female character in the *Captain Underpants* series (who is rarely mentioned) and the *Pokemon* series has three female characters: Misty (portrayed as a brat), Nurse Joy, and Officer Jenny (portrayed as your average ditzy female). I wondered if she would slowly stop valuing her experiences, if she would wait and watch and eventually imitate others. It was a sobering thought.

I had to smile, however, when in the middle of doing a language arts group activity one day, she came up to me with her friend Emily and announced that they were going to go around the world and free all the animals. Amused, I asked her why she thought the animals needed freeing. Molly paused, shrugged her shoulders and said, I don t know. Maybe they do and besides I just LOVE animals! whereupon both girls laughed and skipped back to their desks (FN, March 13/03). I wondered what prompted that decision.

Testing results. During the first week of April I took Molly out into the hallway and administered the *Thinking About My School Inventory* (*TAMS*) (Whitmore, 1974). It was the first time I administered this survey and it took two sessions to complete. I remembered to tape the second session because of the amount of information that she shared through the questions in the first session. I had had trouble writing notes fast enough during the meeting and therefore decided to tape future sessions. The *TAMS* (Whitmore, 1974) survey is composed of 47 questions that are designed to measure student perceptions of the school environment and feelings about their school. The results can then be used in program planning, designing interventions or in engaging students in discussions about their school experience.

Molly loved school and this school in particular. Holidays seemed long to her and she did not look forward to them. She felt that students were not very happy at school but remarked that she was usually happy:

> Molly: I m always happy but other kids are like gloomy and .not very happy. But sometimes I get .I m not exactly unhappy but I m crazy! That s when I m not as happy.
>
> Me: What makes you that way?
>
> Molly: Well, when I make a mistake and then I make another mistake and then I make another mistake and then I make ANOTHER mistake then I get arrrrggg!
>
> Me: Frustrated heh?
>
> Molly: Frustrated. That s mad and happy. Another two of a kind but to me they re sort of the same (FN, April 7/03).

I m not sure how she saw these two emotions as being related or even sort of the same and unfortunately I did not ask for clarification.

Molly felt the students were proud to say they went to this school and felt the grownups at school were their friends and listened to their ideas. The school rules were fair, according to Molly, although she felt the teachers were not always happy at school but failed to give any reasons other than to say if the children were not happy at school, then the teachers were not likely to be either. She agreed that teachers made work fun and was adamant about the importance of working hard. Molly did not find schoolwork boring and did not think teachers asked students to do too much work. Her answers to most of the questions were always very positive and she would repeat yes or no or always emphatically, over and over, as she answered the question, so as to leave no doubt about how she truly felt. Her emotional responses were also evident as she filled in the questionnaire. Beside questions that she felt strongly about there would be not one but at least five large checkmarks, sometimes as large as one-quarter of the page or she would draw numerous stars in the answer space. Sometimes she sang the answer into the microphone and she would always fidget in her chair. At one point she tried to think of a particular word and although I offered suggestions, it was not what she was looking for. Frustrated, she lamented, What is it called?!! It s like a divorce. It s not that .I know what I m thinking .too bad I can t say some sort of brain power to you! (FN, April 7/03). Eventually I figured out she was looking for the word strike — a time she believed teachers worked and the students got holidays.

As we proceeded through the questions, I noticed some of Molly s answers had changed since our last session. For example, Molly stated it was sometimes too noisy to work in the classroom and at the same time told me she was learning a lot this year. During the first session of completing the *Thinking About My School Inventory* (*TAMS*) (Whitmore, 1974), she indicated, sometimes it s the same as grade one (FN, April 6/03). Learning is like day dreaming for me! Now I m learning new stuff like learning how to tell time! Or like learning how to spell harder words, except we just spelled *trip* and we spelled *trip* in grade one (FN, April 7/03). I wondered about the connection between learning and daydreaming that Molly mentioned. Was there so little challenge in the material presented in class that she needed to pretend she did not know what was being taught? She knew how to tell time in grade one and, as she mentioned, also knew how to spell the word *trip*. She did not want to cause problems in class so did she have no choice but to imagine herself learning? Interestingly, although females can also have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), they are not as often diagnosed. Perhaps it is because they are quieter in class than boys and their lack of attention is often attributed to daydreaming rather than as a symptom of ADHD (Smutney, 2003). Although Molly exhibited some of the other characteristics attributed to gifted students with ADHD, such as completing less work, hurrying through it and showing less ability to judge situations for their salient features, she did not display enough to warrant being put into the category of dual exceptionality.

We talked about her reading and Molly revealed she had not been reading the *Harry Potter* books because she was more interested in practicing her drawing. Throughout the entire time we spent answering the survey questions, Molly took a few minutes here and there to draw her new cartoon character Chomp (a male and female version) and various other pictures, on the back of the sheets, flipping back and forth between the questions, her opinions and feelings about each one and her new found hobby that she wanted to share.

I used this instrument to identify Molly s attitude about reading and as a means of monitoring the attitudinal impact of instructional programs. The results of the inventory indicated she was in the seventy-fourth percentile, with no difference in scores between academic and recreational reading, meaning Molly enjoyed both types of reading.

Second Interview — Family #1. The second interview with Molly s father, Bill, and his family took place at the beginning of April, in their home. Although Molly was not present, her two half sisters were. The purpose of this second conversation was to ascertain if Bill and Sherry had noticed any changes since the beginning of grade two, at school or at home, in terms of her reading preferences, behavior towards school or schoolwork, interests, and friends.

According to Bill and Sherry, Molly continued to read voraciously when she stayed with them and had expressed an interest in reading more fiction books. Bill mentioned Molly had devoured all the books she received for Christmas and had nothing left to read. Bill and Sherry had subscribed to the series of *Why?* Books through the mail and Molly had already read the eight they had received. I got the feeling they found it difficult to keep up with her insatiable appetite for books although no one mentioned going to the public library on a regular basis and they all had library cards. Sherry regularly did crafts with the children and showed me what Molly had been working on — a butterfly made of paper and sticks. Molly also created a journal for the butterfly where she could write about the butterfly s adventures. When I asked them if Molly was writing more, Bill mentioned he thought she was engaging in a bit more writing but Sherry remarked, I don t see it. I think she doesn t like it and she doesn t want to write. She s writing in that because that s for her and not for teachers (INT 2a, April 4/03).

Sherry also mentioned that Molly continued to write quickly but she was writing more because she had received a diary and enjoyed writing in it. Bill noticed Molly s strategy of printing her letters very large to convey emotions — rather than using exclamation points, for example. Both Bill and Sherry agreed Molly did not talk about school often and did not voluntarily start her homework. This surprised Sherry who thought she would want to start her homework as soon as she got home from school. Both were quick to point out they did not pressure her into doing it right away, merely made sure the work got done. Molly became interested in Religion, which Bill and Sherry attributed to her having taken her first communion. She also asked numerous math questions, practiced her times tables, practiced making change with Bill and discussed the concept of negative numbers with Sherry.

I asked if she had developed any new friendships since starting grade two and Sherry was quick to reply that Molly realized a popular craze with her peers was the acquisition of Beanie Babies and she had none. Bill mentioned she had talked to him about friends and recounted a conversation they had in the car on the way to school one day where she asked his permission to go with Emily around the world because they needed to free all the animals. He told her he would give his permission when she turned eighteen. We laughed and I voiced my wonders over where the idea for this quest had come from — television programs such as *Crocodile Dundee* or the Discovery Channel perhaps? I wondered if she knew what poaching meant. Bill explained that perhaps the idea had come from the television program *The Wild Thornberrys*, which she regularly watched, in which a family traveled around the world in a motor home rescuing animals. In the show, the father was the host of a nature show, the mother a camera woman and the two of three children, as well as their grandparents, participated in the adventures of rescuing animals around the world. His explanation clarified my wonders and I was not surprised her sense of social justice had revealed itself in this fashion.

The interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes and was peppered with many answers that were inaudible on tape because of the noise the two children made while we talked. Sherry apologized for the clamor and asked me to replay part of the tape so the two girls could listen to what it sounded like when one made so much noise while others were talking. I obliged and they were chastised.

May/June

May and June also passed quickly with special school outdoor activities and a few field trips. I administered most of the tests (*Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test*, *QR III, Stieglitz Reading Inventory*) at the end of May and the beginning of June. I present the observations of both months in the same section because actual observation time in the classroom was limited due to the different class activities planned, my schedule of meetings and class field trips, and because I used the observation class time as testing times for Molly.

Story time on the carpet was a special time for the students and one they would not allow to be replaced with other activities. Molly continued to listen somewhat attentively, she looked around frequently and played with any items that were nearby, but she seemed much more subdued in her reaction to the stories. I did not notice as much movement nor as much exuberance in response to the stories. She often sat quietly, chewing on her necklace, making no comments and asking no questions.

This did not continue during class time, however, when they were engaged in some form of language arts activity — usually filling in worksheets. I noted that the students were being asked to fill out a number of worksheets in class and at home. They would work on one or two during class time and be assigned up to four worksheets for homework. I concur with Freeman (1985) who wrote that although teachers might complain of too much paper work, gifted students like Molly could share in their agony of death by a thousand work sheets (p.15). Molly continued to participate in class discussions, squirming in her desk and reading ahead in — or perhaps re-reading — the anthology or any other book on her desk, whenever she had a moment of free time or whenever she could get away with it. Molly frequently spoke out of turn and was often turned around talking to a friend while Betty was teaching. Attention-seeking behaviors did not subside nor did argumentative episodes.

While Betty explained a worksheet to the class, Molly asked to demonstrate the definition of a magician. Betty agreed and Molly went in front of the class, asked them where they wanted her to put the eraser she had in her hand, to which one of the students responded — on top of the screen behind her. She said okay and as she blew into her cupped hands, she slipped the eraser into the pocket of her jeans and then proudly showed her empty hands. No one believed the eraser had actually disappeared and Betty explained that Molly had shown the class an illusion and went quickly on to the next question. This incident along with several others that occurred over the course of the month did not elicit much response from the other students. It almost seemed as if her attention-seeking behaviors were tolerated and only on occasion were they acknowledged or appreciated.

Molly was still conscious of the praise accorded to her and although she liked it she carefully continued not to be boastful. During a presentation on bullying, while the class was engaged in a discussion about people getting bullied because of the kind of glasses they wore, Molly piped up that people had told her she looked pretty with her new glasses with the Barbie logo on them. It seemed as if she questioned their sincerity after being presented with this new information. She seemed surprised people would make fun of other people for that reason. When some of the class laughed at her comment, she quickly retorted, with a stern look, that she was not trying to be funny. Later, during the talk, the presenters shared the sticks and stones will break your bones poem but had changed the last line to but words will shatter the soul . Molly interjected that she knew the same poem but with a different ending — words will never hurt you . The presenters explained that words do hurt and Molly had to agree, sharing that she had been called a crybaby in grade one. Molly was not afraid to share her feelings and was quite adept at verbalizing them. I wondered if she would remember this new ending to the poem in future bullying situations. A field note entry illustrated my sentiments regarding some of Molly s classroom experiences:

> .I feel frustrated for her and I do not feel like I m helping the situation any although I m not sure what I m supposed to do. What I have noticed, especially lately, is that she is getting reprimanded for things like talking when it s not the time, not raising her hand, or not paying attention. I just realized today that I have yet to hear Betty give any kind of reprimand to Philip [another gifted student in class] (FN, May 22/03).

Given that Molly was much more vocal in class than Philip, perhaps Betty unconsciously focused more on Molly s unacceptable behavior and the subsequent reprimands she gave Molly were an expression of her own frustration of not meeting Molly s needs? It was difficult to determine the reasons for Betty s behavior in these instances.

Molly s sensitivity was again displayed during a disagreement she had with a friend while they were eating snacks at a table and while Molly was reading to them from a book about eagles. They seemed to be getting along well but a short time later I noticed Molly had left the group and was sitting in her desk, obviously upset about something. When I asked what had happened she explained that Emily had insisted that Molly could not transform into an animal — only she could. A short argument ensued and Molly got mad and left the table. Molly stubbornly declared that Emily did not know if she could transform into an animal or not. I asked Molly how she knew she could, whereupon she informed me that, we all have the feelings inside us that make us able to transform (FN, May 1/03). I wanted to question her further but before I had the chance she cried, And then Emily said that snakes could write! (FN, May 1/03). It all seemed too much for her and she went back to her desk to regain her composure. It was evident she wanted to be left alone. I wondered if Molly had been thinking about the power of a person s imagination during this encounter.

Molly had also been upset with a group of boys one morning before school began. The boys had been chanting: Chinese, Japanese, dirty knees, what are these? (pointing to their chests) to her and she was not amused. She marched into class with her arms crossed and told Betty about the incident, seemingly insulted by the inappropriate chant and by their rudeness. Betty agreed it was impolite and said she would talk to the group. I do not know if that talk took place. Despite these disagreements, Molly still seemed a happy student. During a discussion of friendship each student was encouraged to share what was special about themselves. Molly shared, I m special because I have a special reading ability and I get special sheets that no one else gets and I get to go on special excursions with Madame Gauthier (FN, May 15/03). I wondered about the special sheets and was surprised and sad that our infrequent trips to the library, staff room or computer room were considered special excursions . When I asked Molly to sign the permissions sheet so that I could follow her to grade three, she was very pleased: You were with me in grade one and then in grade two and now you re going to follow me to grade three! That s great! (FN, May 12/03). I told her I was also very happy. However, I was not pleased a few days later when I asked Molly about the Association for Bright Children information pamphlets that the school had been sending home informing parents of their special workshops, camps, and talks. Molly informed me that her parents were not interested — her mother did not want to pay. Further, Molly said her mother did not like her to take classes on the weekends because she liked to sleep. Molly lamented that it was getting kinda (sic) boring at home and although she was interested in almost everything, her parents did not allow her to partake in activities, adding her dad worked for an important company and her mother was just a housewife (FN, May 22/03).

The students had another substitute for a day about the middle of May. Like most other students, Molly took advantage of the situation and ate her snacks and part of her lunch throughout the morning, talked to her friends during teaching and working time and along with several other students, spent nine minutes attempting to clarify the spelling test procedures for the substitute. After the Morning Prayer, when the class usually recited the Our Father, I was somewhat surprised to hear Molly tell the substitute that the class should be saying the Hail Mary since it was the month of May. The substitute suggested they do that tomorrow. A short time later, Molly informed her she had written the date (in French) incorrectly on the board and proceeded to tell her how Betty always wrote it. The substitute replied it could be written either way and left it as it was. Gifted students, like Molly, are argumentative, they do not suffer fools gladly , and they often correct others errors, even if the other is their teacher

(Winner, 1996, p. 218). Molly had self-confidence in her abilities, which led to independence of thought and she often marched to her own drummer.

During the second week in May the students did an oral presentation of their dream home. Betty decided to listen to all the presentations in one morning, rather than scheduling it over two days, for lack of time. It was a long time for the students to be listening and not surprisingly, their attention waned after about the fifth presentation. I defer to my field notes for a description of Molly s presentation of her dream home:

It was apparent the students who had given their project some forethought and had practiced. It was equally painfully obvious those who made it up on the spot. Molly was one of those. Her presentation was mainly about how she did not have enough Lego to build anything bigger, about how the people (who represented Jessica and Darin — no mention of the other family) figures did not really resemble them in real life. There was very little in her presentation that had anything to do with what she considered her dream home - what it would look like, the different things it would have in it and why she would choose to have certain styles or objects. As usual, she seemed very confident and in control in the front of the class (she cut people off if she thought they were taking too long to answer a question — Yea, okay and asked someone else who had their hand up) and she always tried to be funny. The head of one of her figurines fell onto the floor and she played it up and made a funny comment. Her speech was not focused — she was all over the place. Several times, when people asked questions about some aspect of her house, she replied she did not know the answer because — as she admitted — she had just made it up right now . Although she was very articulate and used more advanced vocabulary than some of the other children — her ideas were not imaginative nor in any kind of sequence. Whereas other children (who did not have much to say about their dream home) cut their presentation short, Molly tried to drag it out as long as possible. There was always just one more thing Oh, I forgot to mention that or I just wanted to tell you that or she launched into some long explanation of an extraneous item she somehow tried to relate to her point (FN, May 10/03).

Molly had a chance to shine with this assignment. She could have used her imagination, verbal and written skills, and her love of drawing to come up with a unique and interesting dream house. I wondered why she had not risen to the challenge. Perhaps it was too much effort, a lack of choice, or an uninteresting assignment, at least for Molly.

Testing results. I administered the same tests - oral and silent reading passages from the *QR-III* (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995), a listening comprehension test from the *Stieglitz Informal Reading Inventory* (Stieglitz,1992), the *PPVT-III* (Dunn & Dunn,1997) and the *Elementary Reading Attitude* (Rhodes & Kear, 1990) survey - as in the fall of grade two. Results of the oral and silent reading tests showed that Molly was reading at a level five — up one level from the beginning of grade two. Interestingly, she was only able to reach instructional level on a level five listening comprehension passage — down one level from the fall testing period. There may have been a number of reasons for this decline including tiredness, unfamiliarity with the subject, or disinterest in the testing process.

Molly s score also fell on the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* (Rhodes & Kear, 1990) — from the seventy-fourth to the sixty-seventh percentile, indicating a waning interest in both academic and recreational reading. It seemed that perhaps friends became more important than learning in the school context in grade two. The survey indicated the areas where Molly showed less enthusiasm than she had in the fall on the same survey: (a) reading for fun at school, at home, and during summer vacation; (b) being asked questions about what she read; (c) reading in class; and (d) she was less enthusiastic about the stories she read in class. These results were consistent with what I had observed and heard from Molly, in and out of class, over the course of the year. The outcomes could have been the result of a changing focus in school, a lack of encouragement or support in pursuits that interested her, peer or societal pressure to conform to the standards of the classroom or a combination of all of the above.

Molly continued to enjoy and do well on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (Dunn & Dunn, 1997), scoring in the ninety-ninth percentile and reflecting the vocabulary age equivalent of an eighteen year old. These results differed from those in grade two where Molly s scores reflected a vocabulary developmental level consistent with a student eleven years, eleven months old at the beginning of grade two, and those of a student twelve years old by the end of grade two. It seemed that in spite of any perceived difficulties or deficiencies in the class, Molly was reading, learning, and increasing her vocabulary and comprehension, although perhaps at a slower rate in some areas than she was capable of.

I include comments made by Molly during our testing time to give the reader a deeper understanding and appreciation of her:

- I don t think my brain is made for non-fictional things. It s not interested in it.
- I don t like thinking. My forehead gets all sweaty. That s what I don t like about it.
- The different ways I m circling my answers is my different emotions.
- I like learning from books because they re from the past.
- If I don t read a book I m not very happy.
- I can pronounce words better when I read in my mind.
- Fictional books are to amuse people and non-fiction books are for teachers.
- My mom s fashion magazines are inappropriate for me but I don t know why.
- I love Nickleback s and Chad Kruger s music! It s got lots of bad words but when I sing the songs I don t sing the bad words.

As I reflected on Molly s grade two experiences, I remembered a reading that had touched me and made me think about what the educational future might be like for Molly. Molly was now eight years old but she reminded me of the gifted eleven-year-old teenager who poignantly related the profound loss of power she experienced in school:

> *At 11 years old*: School became the universe I lived for — it was the bright sun I revolved around. I breathed just for another day in class, another bit of knowledge, another brain to pick .. That age [11 years] was probably the most stable time of my life. I knew who I was, where I came from and where I was going. I was invincible
>
> *At 17 years old*: I ve lost that obsession to soak up and retain every miniscule grain of knowledge I can possibly gain access to .The future has lost some of its sparkle. It s not a big bright field of possibilities that awaits me . (Lech, as quoted in Maker, 1986, p. 71)

I wondered if this would be Molly s story.

Chapter Six

> *While girls continue to grow up, many aspects of what we liked about them slowly disappear. So what happened to that gifted girl? remembering there was once a girl who showed so much promise (Calic-Newman, 2003, p. 381)*

Data Presentation and Observations — Grades Three and Four

Filled with apprehension and hope, I followed Molly to grade three. I was apprehensive because both the grade level and the English Language Arts program were new to Lucy, the grade three teacher. She also struggled with the English language and I wondered how this would affect Molly s English Language Arts experiences. I was also filled with hope because it was another school year with a new teacher - another beginning in Molly s learning journey. Ever the optimist, I hoped Molly would be challenged in reading and writing and I hoped again to see the love of learning I came to expect from her. My initial plan was to observe Molly in the grade three classroom twice a week until Christmas, conducting the last interviews and testing with her in December. However, at the beginning of October I received an administrative appointment and a new grade level assignment. The amount of work these two new assignments required left less time for observation than I had originally planned. Consequently, classroom observations of Molly were spread out over the course of the school year, as were the testing and interview times. In order to follow Molly s development, I present my insights of her grade three experience in three sections — fall (September to December), winter (January to March) and spring (April to June).

When Molly entered grade four, I took a personal leave of absence from the school district in order to complete my dissertation. I visited the school in mid-September and had a chance to speak with Molly about her grade four class. To my chagrin, Molly calmly stated that the other students had caught up to her academically — she finally felt that she was just the same as her peers. After that heart wrenching statement I decided to meet with Molly again in early January, 2005 to talk about her grade four experience and administer the same tests and surveys once again (the *TAMS, Garfield Reading and Writing Surveys, PPVT III,* and several reading tests). As on previous testing occasions, I let Molly read the questions on the reading, writing and *TAMS* surveys, contrary to what was suggested in the administrative instructions. Again, I hoped this method would continue to be a way to hear the stories surrounding the questions/statements. I follow my observations of her grade three experiences with a snapshot of her school life in grade four.

Grade Three

Fall

Thinking back on the layout of her grade two classroom, the grade three one seemed almost stark by comparison. Lucy, the grade three teacher, had just returned from a two-year leave of absence and was teaching grade three for the first time. As I entered the classroom, I noticed a small empty table for Religion to my right as well as two long whiteboards extending the length of the northern wall. Numerous French math words were displayed on cards above the whiteboards and a table with three small chairs was nestled in the northwestern corner. The classroom was bright with five large windows making up most of the western wall. A long uncluttered counter extended the length of the windows and the shelving underneath contained numerous cubbyholes filled with neatly arranged books and boxes of science and art supplies. Numerous empty cubbyholes were also visible. The counter was bare except for a few items thrown in a corner. Two bulletin boards on the southern wall were covered with yellow paper and had colorful borders around them while other bulletin boards in the classroom remained bare. In the southwestern corner of the room stood a freestanding wooden bookshelf filled with French and English books. There were

20 English books, mostly from the 1977 Mr. Muggs reading series and some counting and Dr. Seuss titles. Twice as many French books were piled on the shelves, most were tattered and from the same era as the Mr. Muggs series. The southern wall had a bulletin board covered in French vocabulary words on one side of the room and the teacher s desk and computer center were located in the southeastern corner. Behind Lucy s desk was an array of cupboards and shelves filled with books, binders, and papers of various sizes and colors. Along the eastern wall were two more whiteboards and letters of the alphabet in cursive writing were on display above them. An easel with a large writing pad and a rectangular table stood in front of the whiteboards on this side of the room. Lucy used the table to put her books, binders, papers, handouts, and other teaching aids. Although this was Lucy s first time teaching grade three, she had many years of experience at the grade two level and a few years at the upper elementary level. She was excited to be back at the school and excited about her new assignment.

There were 23 students in Molly s class. It seemed a calmer class than in grade two, and there were some students I did not know. I wondered what the class dynamics would be like this year as I looked around and noticed some of the same faces as last year. The students were seated in pairs and Molly was sitting beside William, the same gifted student who was with her last year. When I first walked into the classroom in early September, she beamed at me while bopping up and down in her seat. It was good to see her still smiling, still so enthusiastic. On my first day of observation I listened to the students choral read a poem that Lucy had put on the overhead projector and I wondered how often the class would engage in this type of exercise over the course of the year.

The first week of school was filled with getting to know you activities that included discussions, artwork, a swimming field trip, and the completion of a teacher designed survey. The survey had the students walk around the classroom asking their classmates which hand they wrote with, what sports they played and a host of other questions designed to become acquainted. Later, Lucy asked the class what kinds of things they thought they would learn this year and what kinds of things they like would to do. During the ensuing discussion Molly shared that she wanted to ride her bike and she wanted to learn how to knit. Although I do not remember hearing any twitters from the boys, I did notice some eye rolling.

After about a month, I realized Lucy s teaching style was much like Betty s — she tolerated a fair amount of noise while the children worked and there was almost constant whispering, scuffling and inattention when she taught. Lucy also often talked over the students. A group of three active boys quickly formed a friendship that negatively impacted the classroom dynamics and Lucy s time. They were often seen running around the classroom or down the hallways and were often off task during group work. One of these boys, *Jason*, had been with Molly since grade one. Although they got along quite well in grade two, she seemed to have less patience with him this year. In one instance, while Lucy was dictating the new word wall words for the week, Jesse was attempting to get a piece of tape off the side of Molly s desk. She asked him to stop several times, her voice growing increasingly annoyed. After receiving no response to her pleas, Molly gave me an exasperated look, as if to say, You remember what he was like! rolled her eyes and left him to tackle the sticky tape.

Molly continued to be quite assertive. At the end of grade two she had questioned a substitute teacher on how to write the day and date in French, on the board. Apparently, she had forgotten being told it could be written two ways and questioned Lucy on the format when she wrote the date on the board. Molly s difficulty lay in the placement of the article — she was used to seeing and writing the day and date in French as follows: jeudi, le 4 mai (Thursday, May 4), as opposed to le jeudi, 4 mai. To her it both looked and sounded funny because she had been taught to write and say the article before the date. Upon questioning Lucy about this she was told that this was the way Lucy had been taught in University but, if Molly insisted on writing the date the other way, it would not be a huge error .

I could not help laughing on another occasion when Molly was searching through the Table of Contents in their mathematics book (as Lucy requested) to find the differences between the grade two and three programs. She was happily chatting to William sitting next to her, who was seemingly bored by the whole exercise and unresponsive to both the task and to Molly s chatter, when Molly suddenly stopped, looked at him with an exasperated look and said, Est-ce-que tu m entends? (Do you hear me?). His response was an indifferent shrug and hers was to keep chattering, to herself, scowling as she spoke.

Organization continued to be a weak point for Molly in grade three. For the most part, her locker and desk were in a constant state of disarray and she often could not find the worksheets and assignments that she needed. There were times when Molly did not follow instructions. In one instance, she was supposed to hand in a contract for a French book report presentation and in the contract Molly was to indicate the name of the book, the author, the number of pages and when they would be ready to present in front of the class. At first Molly had difficulty finding her contract and, when she finally located it, she realized she had chosen an English book instead of a French one. She lamented that all her French books were at her father s and she was staying with her mother for the week. Since she was not ready to present, Lucy asked Molly to help a classmate read a French book. Molly proceeded to read the book to her classmate while several short presentations took place. Lucy noticed her reading during the presentations and asked her to stop but Molly read a few more pages while others were presenting and when Lucy was not paying attention. Molly continued to enjoy playing the teacher and being in control. For Molly, helping a classmate read seemed to mean reading the text herself. Whether this was because she liked to get things over with , because it was yet another opportunity for her to show her talent or because she wanted to please Lucy and be noticed in a favorable light in front of her peers, I did not know. Perhaps it was for all those reasons.

Molly s preferred English reading list continued to be dominated by non-fiction books, including books on cats, while her French reading preferences were more at grade level and included mostly easy fiction books. She continued to participate in choral reading with the class and continued to have her hand up ready to answer questions and share comments and stories. When the class broke into groups to practice reading with expression and/or actions, Molly read the texts in rap style including the actions, which seemed in keeping with her new found interest in music.

During an observation session in late October, I noticed Molly wearing her jacket in the classroom. As soon as I was able to speak to her, without disrupting the lesson, I asked her if she was wearing her coat because she was cold. Her coat was zipped to her chin. Shaking her head sadly, she approached me shyly and unzipped her coat to reveal a Toronto Maple Leafs hockey jersey underneath. I remembered her fervent support of this team in grade one, although I suspected she merely wanted to cheer for the opposite team her father was cheering for. Molly said she did not want to remove her coat for fear the other children would see her jersey and tease her. I asked why she thought she would be teased and Molly replied that the Toronto Maple Leafs were a loser team and she was afraid some children might make remarks that would make her feel bad. I told her that it should not matter what the others thought — everyone had the right to their opinion but they did not have the right to bully others and teasing was a form of bullying. After a short discussion, I encouraged her not to be afraid to stand up for her beliefs. She smiled, took her coat off, said okay and proceeded to her desk. Although it was the last I heard of the hockey jersey this had been the first time I noticed Molly try to hide her beliefs for fear of retribution. I found it a disquieting experience and wondered if there would be more like it.

September 2003 test results. As in previous testing sessions, Molly happily shared numerous family and school stories, comments and anecdotes. I administered four reading passages (expository, narrative, listening, and oral), and for each one Molly read a grade six passage at instructional level. It was interesting to note her thought processes as she answered a question pertaining to one of the reading passages about sharks teeth:

> Me: What would happen if the shark only had one set of permanent teeth?
>
> Molly: It would have to go to the doctor shark and get some false teeth. They wouldn t be able to eat Oh yes! But they would, because sharks swallow their food whole! They just wouldn t look that fierce. So actually that would be better. They wouldn t look that nasty because they wouldn t be fierce and then when they come up [to their prey], open their mouth and swallow them whole. Because sharks don t chew. Just like snakes (FN, Sept 18/03).

Molly would have been only too happy to have sharks appear less nasty and fierce making it easier for them to get their food and making their appearance less frightful to humans.

Molly was eight years old at the beginning of grade three and scored the age equivalent of a late 13 year old in vocabulary development on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III — PPVT-III.* During the *PPVT-III* test, Molly used the process of elimination when she was unsure of which picture matched the word I said. She would also name each of the pictures if she was unsure of the meaning of the word, as though saying the words aloud while pointing to each of the pictures would help her know where the unfamiliar word belonged. Near the end of the testing, while trying to find the image belonging to a difficult word she lamented, the words don t sound like any of the images (FN, Sept 18/03). I was curious about the association between sound and image in Molly s mind. Although the word was spoken, not written, I wondered if Molly had not seen the word in her head, as she often did when she was attempting to spell an unfamiliar word. If this was the case, perhaps the situation was evidence of what Van Tassel-Baska, Johnson and Boyce (1996) show as the complex progress that takes place in reading as the child moves from print to meaning — from picture-as-thought to written-word—as-thought and vice versa (p.101). The authors state that a verbally talented learner is agile at manipulating linguistic symbols and the language code involved in transmitting thought into expression (or in the case of reading, expression into thought) (p. 101). Was Molly attempting to find a conceptual analogy in the spoken word that might help her understand it s meaning and therefore be able to choose the correct picture?

Molly s first report card in grade three indicated she put in an excellent effort in French and English reading. According to the report card, Molly read and showed a very good understanding of varied texts and also read familiar texts orally with fluency and expression.

Winter

Molly was glad to be back at school after the Christmas break and proudly shared what she had received from her parents: the book *Matilda*, an encyclopedia, the *Dolphin Diaries* series of books and a workbook for 3rd and 4th graders in mathematics, spelling and multiplication. There were a few other items she quickly mentioned but did not dwell on. I wondered how much of this outward show of enthusiasm about books was for my benefit.

Molly s classroom behavior had not changed significantly from the beginning of the year. She still fidgeted in her desk during most seatwork activities and continued to play with items in her desk and talk with friends around her, while Lucy taught. However, she was also still eager to respond to Lucy s questions or partake in class discussions. Molly continued to display her independence and authority through her interactions with peers. During one of the few visits I made to the classroom, Molly engaged me in conversation while her partner read her a report she had written. It was some time before she turned her attention to her partner, Rhonda. When Rhonda noticed she had Molly s interest, she began to read the report again. Molly cut Rhonda s short by waving her hand and informing her she did not need to start over because she had heard it already. Both girls proceeded to the back of the classroom to finish the exercise with Molly leading the way.

On January 7, 2004, I took Molly out of the classroom to administer the *Elementary Reading Survey* and the *TAMS Survey*. I deliberately waited this length of time before administering these measures, to give Molly a chance to become acquainted with her new classmates, teacher and the academic demands of grade three. I also knew that since my visits were infrequent, engaging in this exercise, at this time, would give me the opportunity to determine if there were any changes in her reading habits and attitudes compared to her grade two performance.

While completing the *Elementary Reading Survey,* Molly elaborated on most of the questions she read. I discovered she read, when the cable [TV] is out , sometimes one half hour before bedtime, and that most of her reading was done in the spring and summer when she lays on the porch like a lazy cat . She continued, most of the books I read are so emotional! Some are sad, some are scary, and some are joyful . Her favorite book was still *Matilda* (the book Betty read aloud to the class in grade two and which Molly had subsequently read a billion times) and she said that she continued to learn a lot from books. I wondered why she read Roald Dahl s book *Matilda* so many times. The book is about a young gifted girl and her unsophisticated parents, who insist that she watch television rather than engage her passion for reading. The stage is set early in the book when we find the parents eating TV dinners and enjoying an evening of mindless television viewing while four year old Matilda reflects upon the Charles Dickens s novel *Great Expectations*, which she had recently finished reading. A review by Publishers Weekly had this to say about *Matilda*:

> Matilda is an extraordinarily gifted four-year-old whose parents, a crass, dishonest used-car dealer and a self-centered, blowsy bingo addict, regard her as "nothing more than a scab." Life with her beastly parents is bearable only because Matilda teaches herself to read, finds the public library, and discovers literature. Also, Matilda loves using her lively intelligence to perpetrate acts of revenge on her father.
>
> Adults may cringe at Dahl's excesses in describing the cruel Miss Trunchbull [her teacher], as well as his reliance on overextended characterization at the expense of plot development. Children, however, with their keenly developed sense of justice, will relish the absolutes of stupidity, greed, evil and might versus intelligence, courage and goodness (Retrieved April 20,2005, www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/

tg/detail).

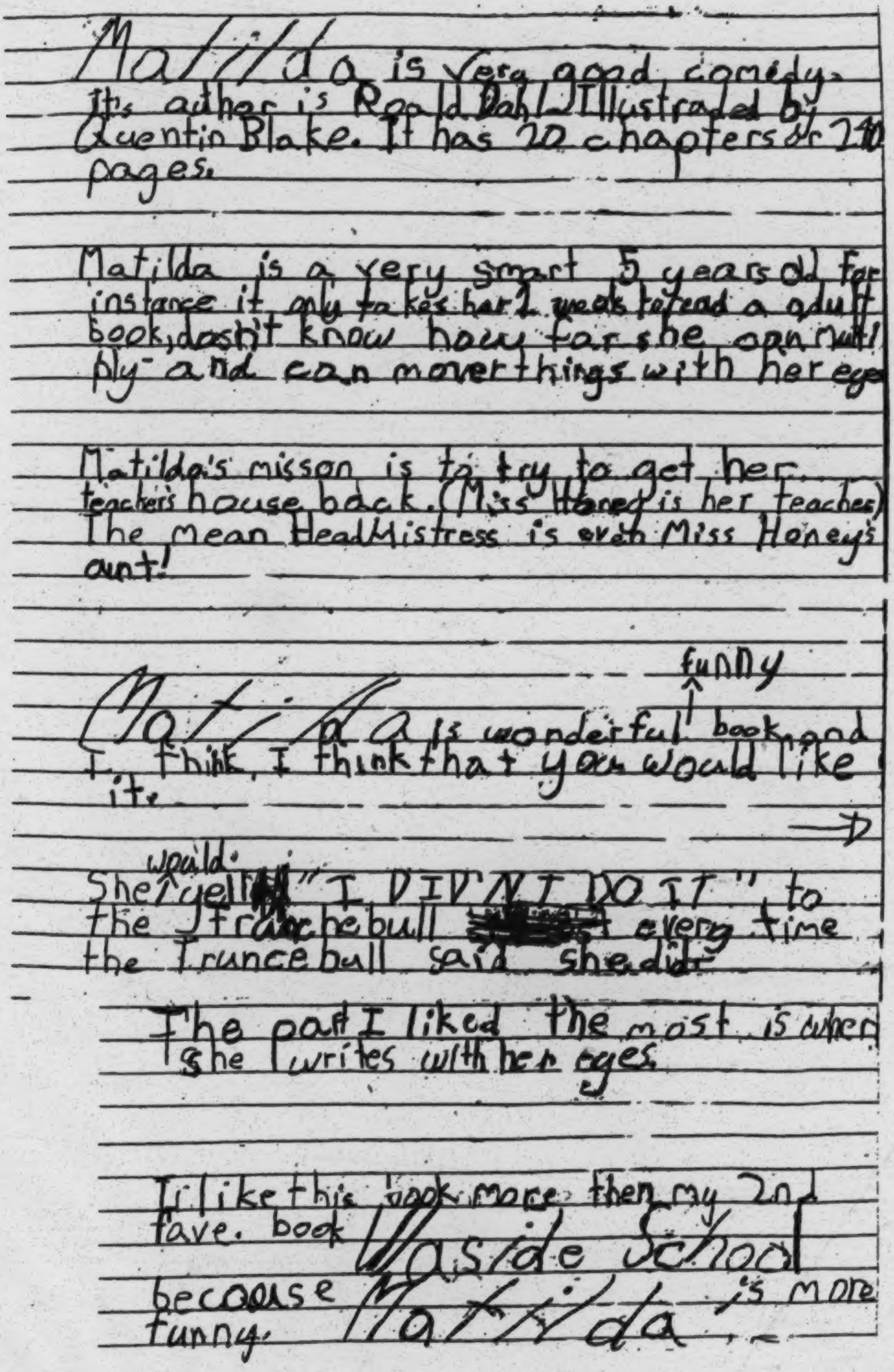
In retrospect, I wished I had asked Molly why she read this particular book so often. I can now only speculate as to her reasons - perhaps it was because the heroine was a gifted female fighting for her individuality, not unlike Molly herself. Or perhaps she was bored with her other books. Molly s synopsis of this book is shown in Figure 3.

Molly complained that although she regularly asked to be taken to the Public Library, her request was rarely accommodated. Sometimes I don t have enough books and I beg them [her mother or father] to buy me new ones. The solution to her dilemma was to re-read the books whose story line had been forgotten. School was Molly s favorite place to read — I like reading stories at school. It s probably the thing I like to do at school the most . At home she confessed that she played with Barbies, built Barbie houses out of Lego and watched television all at the same time. When I asked about reading in French she indicated she enjoyed reading short stories in French and filling in the accompanying worksheets. This was perhaps not surprising, as these types of exercises did not require much effort on her part.

Our conversation continued as Molly answered the questions on the *TAMS* survey. As on previous occasions, Molly read each question and freely gave her opinion, thoughts, support or misgivings for most of them. School still evoked warm sentiments for her. Molly felt that if a person worked hard they would learn a lot and when you learn a lot you can be anything you want . Her aspirations were to become a model or an actress, wanting particularly to replace the cartoon character Stitch in the movie Lilo and Stitch. I wondered why. Film critic James Berardinelli had this to say about the Disney movie:

> *Lilo & Stitch* is easily Disney s worst animated feature . Despite countless pop references and the occasionally witty line of dialogue, this

Figure 3



Matilda is very good comedy. It's auther is Roald Dahl. Illustraded by Quentin Blake. It has 20 chapters or 240 pages.

Matilda is a very smart 5 years old for instance it only takes her 1 weeks to read a adult book, dosn't know how far she can multiply and can mover things with her eyes

Matilda's misson is to try to get her teacher's house back. (Miss Honey is her teacher) The mean HeadMistress is even Miss Honey's aunt!

Matilda is wonderful funny book, and I think, I think that you would like it.

She would yell [illegible] "I DIDN'T DO IT", to the Jfranchebull [illegible] every time the Truncebull said she did.

The part I liked the most is when she writes with her eyes.

I like this book more then my 2nd fave. book Waside School because Matilda is more funny.

Molly's thoughts on *Matilda*.

> movie cannot overcome an uninspired plot about friendship and family, nor can it avoid scenes of crass, clumsy manipulation The emotional core of the story, about the bonding of an alien creature with a human child, echoes Steven Spielberg s 1982 feature [E.T.], even though Stitch is less benevolent . While it s good for a children s film to teach things like tolerance and the importance of family, *Lilo & Stitch* uses an approach that s close to sermonizing — overt and obvious, with every point repeatedly pounded home (Retrieved April 21, 2005 from http://moviereviews.colossus.net/movies/1/lilo.html).

Although there were some positive comments (mostly by parents and children), I wondered if the nurturing aspect of the film was what appealed to Molly and those who enjoyed the movie.

Molly continued reading and responding to the survey questions. She indicated her preference to work alone rather than in groups and again admitted that writing was not her favorite thing to do . Molly paused and reflected before she read the statement, Teachers make work more fun and responded, They do I ll have to think about that one . I think work is fun by itself. Sometimes the teachers don t have to make the work more fun. It s always fun for me . I found Molly reflected on the questions more than she had on previous testing occasions. When she spoke of her friends, she lamented, Sometimes my friends don t even know I m there [in the group]. When that happens they shove me around like a thin piece of air. But that s very rare . Molly s distress over being invisible to her friends, her ensuing excuse for their behavior and her lack of voice in the situation, left me wondering if this was an example of her willingness to suppress what she felt in order to stay in relationship with her friends (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Final interview - Family #2. The final interview with Molly s mother, Jessica, and stepfather, was conducted in their home with Molly present. I suspected Molly would dominate the conversation although I was curious to see how she would behave in a setting other than school. The interview began with Molly wanting to ask a question — a scenario that would repeat itself frequently during my visit. It turned out not to be a question but rather a story about a spy kid movie. And it was like a blooper at the end So there was (sic) these two kids and one got a really cool guitar that would play like a cool guy. The girl would wear a belt and microphone head so she would be able to dance and sing, like Britney Spears. And then after that they did such a good job but then the uncle said, I can t believe it! I forgot to press the play button! Only once had I forgotten to press the record button on my tape recorder during our sessions together but my distress over the incident had evidently stayed with her. I suspected she believed our sessions to be important and special and did not want me to repeat the same mistake, so the story was her way of making sure the recorder was on. It was a polite and obtuse approach in front of her parents, of making sure an adult did not make the mistake again. I wondered about this strategy — had we been in the classroom I was certain Molly would have questioned me directly. I sensed that Molly wanted to make a point, but did not want conflict and knew that polite behavior was what her parents expected.

My first question in the interview concerned the academic, behavioral or emotional changes, if any, that Jessica had noticed during grade three. Jessica said she was more grown up, talked more, used different expressions in her everyday verbal exchanges and asked more mature questions. Darin remarked that she was starting to get into other reading material such as the novel *Matilda* (to which Molly responded, that I read like a billion times) and he added that she continued to enjoy her chapter books and books about snakes. Molly gravely announced I m getting more into music now and proceeded to list the names of some of her favorite French and English recording artists. She received a guitar for Christmas, on which she had been strumming and inventing songs. I was surprised at this bit of information, as Molly had not mentioned receiving a guitar while listing her Christmas gifts during a previous conversation. Jessica believed Molly to have a special talent in the area of song writing and was continually amazed at how quickly she invented lyrics and tunes. According to Jessica, Molly often took an idea from a movie or book, invented a tune, the lyrics and sang it all at the same time. Molly was not taking guitar lessons and I got the impression that the guitar was given to her, not as a serious interest in developing musical talent, but so she could have some fun with it . Molly was interested in taking lessons and informed me that Philip (a gifted classmate who takes music lessons) wrote me a book on how to play Au Claire de la Lune. Jessica and Darin were thinking of letting her take lessons next year although I subsequently learned that did not transpire.

I was happy to hear that Darin and Jessica had taken Molly to the public library, albeit sporadically, and encouraged her to select at least one fiction book among the many animal books she continued to devour. Darin mentioned that not only did Molly know her way around a book pretty well (Jessica commented this trait came from her) but she was also familiar with some illustrators and easily recognized their works.

Molly s taste in television programs had changed from cartoons such as *Pokemon and Digimon* in grade two, to reality type shows such as *Fear Factor*, *Extreme Makeover* and *Trading Spaces*, in grade three. Molly now had a television in her room although Jessica stated she rarely watched it. Jessica mentioned Molly would much rather sew because she now wanted to become a fashion designer. Molly hurriedly interrupted and said she still wanted to become a veterinarian (this seemed to be for my benefit) and concluded by saying she was not sure anymore. Molly continued to display a sense of humor and much of her conversation with her mother, on the rides to and from school, dealt with relationship matters rather than with academic issues. This seemed to be an indication that friends and popularity were becoming more important than schoolwork, supporting Silverman s (1993) statement that in elementary school, gifted girls direct their mental energies into developing social relationships. As gifted girls move into adolescence they are often faced with choosing between the competing goals of popularity and academic achievement and in most instances peer relations take precedence over intellectual interests (Robinson & Noble, 1987).

When I asked how Molly s writing was coming along this year, the majority of our conversation dealt with the way Molly s writing looked — the formation of letters and how she really had to have her own style whatever she s doing, she had to make it her own.   Darin and Jessica spoke of the improvement in her art, in handwriting and Molly offered the information that she was doing a book entitled *The Legend of the Unicorn.* It was a creative endeavor she was doing at home, with her as author and Jessica as illustrator. I found it odd she would ask Jessica to illustrate her book considering she mentioned on several occasions how much she enjoyed drawing. There were a couple of other changes over the year that Jessica noted - Molly was now playing with Barbies in the bath rather than her large collection of plastic snakes, bugs, lizards and other creatures, and she was registered in an art class. I m going to be taught by a Japanese animator is (sic) going to teach me how to draw like Japanese.   While the three of us were engaged in this conversation, Molly drew. I got the impression she was losing some of her self-confidence and was learning to steel herself against unwanted laughter or criticism of her abilities, as was evidenced when she showed me the picture of a duck she had drawn stating, Laugh if you want. I know the lips look weird. In actual fact I was admiring the details she had included in her picture — the earrings, matching necklace. I wondered about the inclusion of these items in her picture since apart from the small studs she normally wore in her ears, Molly rarely wore any other jewelry, nor did she wear dresses very often. Perhaps these girly attributes she added to her picture were another example of a gradual inclination towards a more socially acceptable image of her. After Molly briefly showed me the different types of lips she could draw, I asked if there were any subjects she found difficult this year.

Apart from mathematics being more difficult, especially division, and that French dictee now consisted of memorizing sentences rather than single words, she did not find any subject difficult. However, she complained that in English we have to write a whole bunch of stories and we don t get to finish them on time .it takes so long to do my story because I have to think. What s going to happen next? And my thinking takes up all my time because I m trying to make up something creative.

> When I asked Darin and Jessica if they felt Molly was being challenged enough in school the answer was a qualified yes:
>
> Jessica: Well, I would hope so.
>
> Molly: I say I am.
>
> Jessica: I think she is yea. Cause she has limitations like everybody else
>
> Molly: Yea. I have weaknesses and I have strengths.
>
> Jessica: At home I don t think we do anything more than have her read lots. Where at her age I don t know if it s important for her to practice math so much. I mean, to a point I think maybe . You re getting to be almost nine.

> Jessica: I would not say that she s struggling but I would not think either that she can be more challenged. I think at this point it might be too much ..

Although they both thought Molly was being sufficiently challenged in school, no one gave any examples of what this might have looked like. At the end of the interview the conversation drifted to the weather and the accompanying allergies that Jessica and Molly suffered. I noted Molly was still being reminded not to brag about her abilities:

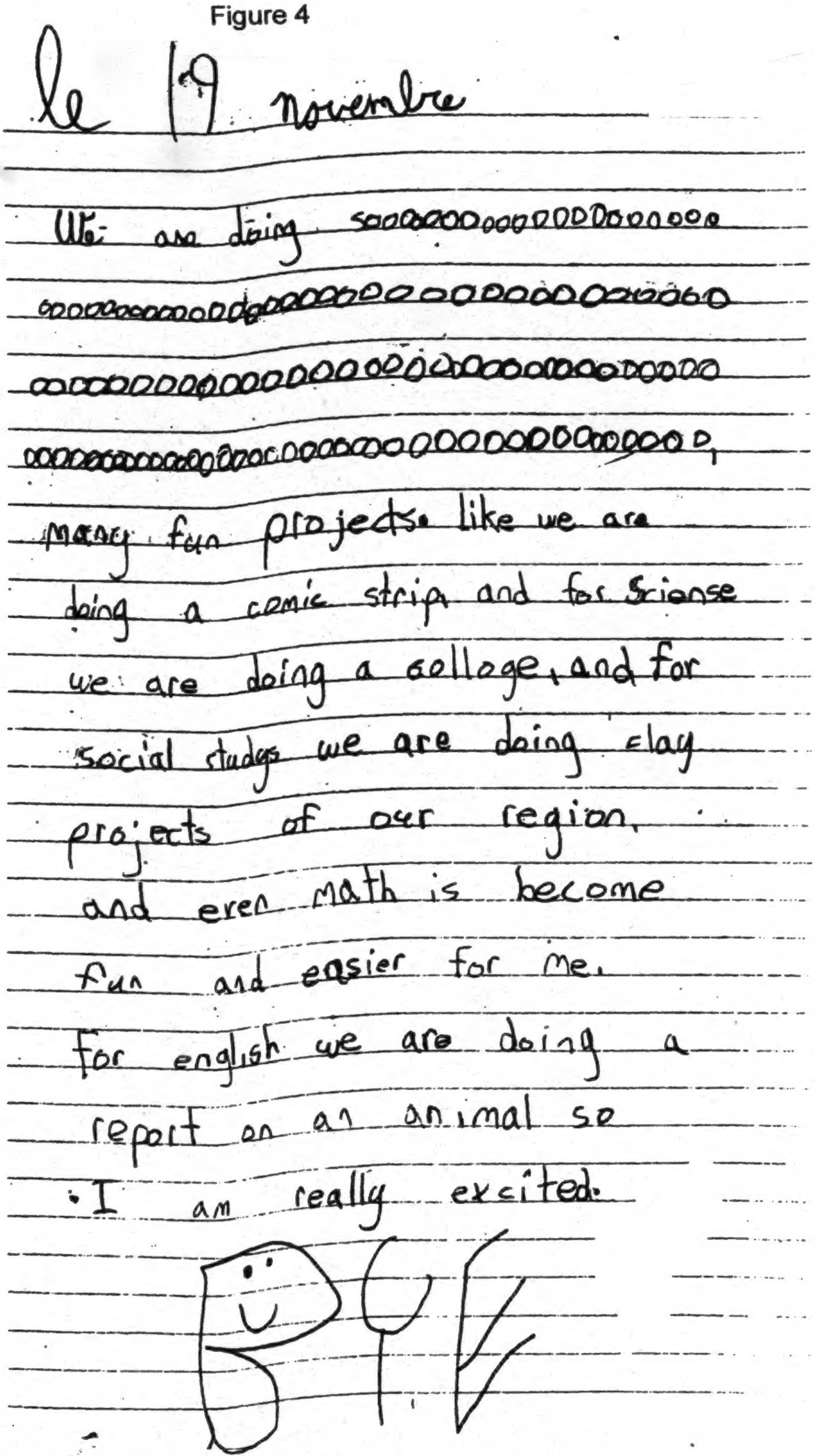
> Molly: And I already have a cold now.
>
> Me: Well, with this weather . It s not surprising.
>
> Jessica: Even with me it s like allergies or something.
>
> Molly: She has the same thing as me. And I can barely sing now. I can t let out my talent to singing now because
>
> Jessica: Your what?
>
> Molly: My talent to singing.
>
> Jessica: Your talent to singing That s bragging a bit isn t it?
>
> Molly: Well, I think I m pretty good at singing.
>
> Jessica: Yea. Well, it s practice too.

I observed that while Molly attempted to describe how she felt physically and how her allergies affected her singing abilities, she was being admonished for bragging. This situation reminded me of what Brown and Gilligan (1992) stated about the beginning awareness of the seven and eight year old gifted girls in their study, that their teachers and parents . use the injunction to be nice as a way to control girls expression of feelings and thoughts and, in this way, to orchestrate their behavior, to keep them from saying too much or speaking too loudly (p.52). I realized that, ever so subtly, Molly s voice was effectively being silenced, even as she again attempted to speak openly about how she felt and what she knew.

Grade Four

My initial plan did not include following Molly to grade four. However, as was mentioned earlier, the heart wrenching comment made to me on an impromptu visit in early September 2004, I m finally the same as the others [her peers]. They have finally caught up to me , prompted me to visit with her in mid-January, 2005. It should be noted that there were many changes occurring at the school during the month of September. The government allocated monies to the schools to reduce class sizes and this had a direct impact on Molly. At the beginning of the year there were two classes of grade fours with approximately 34 students in each class. With the new government initiative the administration scrambled to hire more teachers to reduce the class sizes in several grade levels. By mid October Molly had been moved into a third grade four classroom of 20 students. The comment that had disturbed me came before the move to a new classroom. After the move, her initial feelings about school and her new classroom were positive as can be seen in a journal entry dated November 19, 2004 (Figure 4). In mid January 2005 I administered the *Elementary Reading and Writing Surveys*, the *TAMS Survey* and two reading tests. I decided to administer these tests and measures in order to continue tracking her journey in

Figure 4



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We are doing soooooooooooooooooooo
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ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo,
many fun projects. like we are doing a comic strip and for Sciense we are doing a collage, and for social studys we are doing clay projects of our region.
and even math is become fun and easier for me.
For english we are doing a report on an animal so I am really excited.

BYE

Enjoying the beginning of grade four.

reading, in her attitude towards learning and school and I knew that it would open the door to conversations that might help me discover the reasons behind her earlier disheartening comment. The tests and surveys were administered in two separate sessions lasting approximately one hour. We had not seen each other for some time and Molly had a lot to share. During our first session (January 13, 2005) we began with a general discussion, catching up with what was new in Molly s life and completing the *TAMS Survey* and the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey*. During the second session (January 14, 2005) we completed the *Denver Writing Survey* and the reading tests.

General discussion. Molly began our discussion with a synopsis of a book she was writing — something she knew I would be interested in hearing:

> It s about a girl and her name is Abbey. And she s dreaming that she s in this dark, misty land where the shadows are lurking behind the trees and everything. And there s two moons and it s quite spooky and ghastly (sic). She s getting scared because of course this was a nightmare and a lot of people know the expression, The only thing that you should fear the most is fear itself , so, but in my book I imagine that fear itself is in a body shape. Have you seen the third Harry Potter movie? You know the dementors? It s kind of in the shape of that. Well, after a couple of chapters Abbey wakes up from that dream and suffers that in reality — exactly what happened in her dream.

When I asked if she had finished the book she shook her head and replied she d finished chapter one but had been too busy with her new computer game and watching programs on the new flat screen television with built in DVD that she now had in her room. She said she was not allowed to watch television in her room at night and then abruptly changed topics and told me her bedroom library had expanded. She had too many books to fit on her shelves but was very happy she had another $50 gift certificate from Chapters to spend. Surprisingly, Molly confirmed that her taste in books had changed — I like fantasy books now. I m not so much a non-fiction person no more. I like to dig into the big, everlasting gobstopper and start reading . Everlasting gobstopper was an expression from the movie *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* that she used to refer to big chapter books. I wanted to ask what relation she saw between the two but she spoke so quickly and jumped from topic to topic that the moment was lost. However, Molly mentioned she had read all her Harry Potter books twice; that she really liked dragon books but did not know why; and that she really liked to draw. Perhaps interest in dragon books was a result of her imaginary dragon friend Spiro — a character inspired by a video game of the same name.

She was bursting with energy and enthusiasm during our conversation, although it was more tempered than in our encounters the previous year. I thought part of this change came from the fact that we had not seen each other for a while and needed a bit of time to connect and find the comfort level we had enjoyed when I was at the school full-time and saw her on a regular basis. I believed that another part of the tempered enthusiasm and energy I witnessed had to do with the maturation process — she did not seem as squirmy during our meeting and her demeanor and conversation seemed more mature - as well as a heightened awareness of social expectations, as can be seen in the responses to some of the questions on the *TAMS Survey*, which followed our general discussion.

Thinking About My School (TAMS). As in previous assessment encounters, Molly read the test items herself and freely elaborated on almost every one. Her feelings on some aspects of school had not changed since grade three: (a) the classroom was sometimes still noisy to work in, (b) work was fun, (c) she still preferred working alone, (d) she loved reading in front of the class, (e) perusing the dictionary continued to intrigue her, and (f) she continued to enjoy English (probably because they are always doing reports on animals). Her feelings about other aspects of school had either changed from grade three or were voiced for the first time. She did not seem as sure about certain things. For instance, Molly was no longer sure that hard work paid off in school because one time we had math and it said how many kilometers does a dolphin swim in an hour? Why do we even care how much a dolphin swims in an hour? As I sat listening to this comment, I remembered times in grades one and two when Molly would have excitedly shared the answer to such a question or if she had not known the answer, would have searched for it. I also wondered about the relevancy of this comment in relation to the survey statement. It seemed to me Molly was confusing hard work with curiosity and I wondered whether Molly felt pressured by her peers into believing hard work and curiosity were not of value. Ambivalence on the topic of working hard surfaced a short time later when Molly declared; You should *always* try better in school work even if you re getting VG s [on your report card] off the hook! And we ll become real good people like you who are in very high college or university . Molly also began to doubt whether teachers liked all the subjects they taught — Teachers*probably* like doing every single subject. But I think my teacher likes to get science over with. It seemed Molly was becoming more attuned to those around her. She was taking in the evidence of her senses , tentatively trusting what she felt and letting it guide her understanding (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

In grades one to three Molly had always shown a great deal of self-confidence and had liked almost everything about school, but in grade four, cracks began to appear in her stoic exterior. Molly complained that they did not write enough stories in class and finally admitted she did not like doing worksheets, adding that projects made you learn — it s always more fun than writing down answers on plain pieces of paper. I like doing more active stuff. Whenever they [teachers] give us lots [worksheets], it s usually really easy . Although Molly voiced her disappointment in some aspects of her learning she felt she was learning more in grade four than she had in grade three. However, her ambivalence was again evident when she tried to explain:

> I m learning more than in grade three. Way more. Except sometimes Madame repeats information. I don t know why she does that. We ve already learned it once, she repeats it .so I keep on looking at the bulletin board .I didn t learn that much last year but I learned lots this year. Maybe that s because last year I read way more fiction books non-fiction books, so I would learn more but here now, I m reading less

> non-fiction books and I m reading more fantasy books so that s why I m not learning as much. Well, I still learn lots but that s why I m not knowing the answer to every single question the teacher asks.

Continuing with this theme, I asked Molly if there was anything she found difficult this year.

> Molly: As a matter of fact, no. Everything s going fine for me. Nothing s too easy. Everything is just my level. Except for reading comprehension. That gets a bit too easy Cause I m reading, I m reading, everyone s still reading and I m done and I m also done my questions.
>
> Me: You told me back in September that you were finally at the same level as everybody else. What did that mean?
>
> Molly: I don t remember saying that.

I was surprised to hear this given that her memory had always been exceptional. Was this really a lapse in memory or was she attempting to fit in — moving her real thoughts and feelings underground to protect her private knowledge, what she really knew and felt? (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) Did she realize she had, in fact, affirmed what she had forgotten?

It was evident that Molly was beginning to question the status quo. The tentative way she answered some questions, coupled with the waffling of positions within her answer, seemed to be evidence of an inner struggle between an evolving personal identity that was in conflict with the expectations of those around her. Despite these periods of fluctuating reasoning, Molly s voice and determination were still present as can be seen when she told me about her latest career aspirations:

> Molly: Cause one thing for sure. I m not going to be a zoologist. I m being an author. And this is my final decision. I m going to be a part-time actress, part-time author. So while I m going to Hollywood, L.A .on my journey there, while I m driving my Mustang, going to LA, I m going to write my books.
>
> Me: You already know what kind of car you want?
>
> Molly: Yup. And I m gonna have a plate that says Ford Rocks — spelled Rox. I m not putting Chevy, I don t like Chevy.
>
> Me: How come? What do you know about Chevy?
>
> Molly: My dad likes them. I don t like them.
>
> Me: But you don t know why.
>
> Molly: No. I just like Ford.
>
> Me: Why do you like Ford?
>
> Molly: They re heavy duty.

There are two important points arising out of this conversation. The first pertains to her changed career choice and the second to relationships.

In grade three, Molly s career choices of actress and fashion designer were consistent with the dreams of many adolescent girls. In grade four, she kept the adolescent dream of becoming an actress and coupled it with the wish to become an author at the same time. I wondered whether this latter aspiration was in part for my benefit, as it was still related to reading. Then again, according to Coleman and Cross (2001), literary careers are common among the gifted. More intriguing however was the career portrait the authors painted of gifted literary figures and how many of the factors were applicable to Molly s case. Coleman and Cross (2001) stated that literary figures were likely to have been only children who were cognizant at an early age of conflict within their families (p. 58). Molly was an only child whose parents divorced when she was very young. These gifted literary figures were also avid readers as children, created fantasy worlds, daydreamed regularly, and seemed to have been keen and sensitive observers of life. Molly was an early, avid reader, had an imaginary friend in kindergarten and grade one and talked of daydreaming episodes in grades one, two and three. Perhaps it was not surprising that Molly considered this career path.

Molly s comments also offered another example of how she seemed to like the opposite of what her father liked. Since grade one she has cheered for the Toronto Maple Leafs (even wearing their hockey jersey on sports days), while her father cheered the Edmonton Oilers. In the above conversation Molly said she liked Ford automobiles because they were heavy duty (her only knowledge of their attributes) over her father s preference of Chevrolets. Hockey and cars are typically male domains and Molly chose a position opposite to that of her father, in both.

For the first time, when answering the question of whether or not school rules were fair, Molly admitted that all school rules were not fair. She lamented for some time over the inability to bring any peanut butter or food items containing peanut butter into the school due to students with severe allergies. At the end of the discussion her comment was, I m not happy about it. It s fair and I understand it but I don t like it. Whereas in the past Molly seemed to have blindly accepted the school rules, she now expressed her opinion on an issue that had bothered her for some time. Although she still conceded to the dominant position it was perhaps because of lack of choice and because she still wanted to follow the rules and be good .

Molly did not have a lot to share in the area of friendships at school. When I asked her to talk to me about her friends this year, she said she liked it when the whole class listened to her (when she read aloud, did a presentation or when she got their attention during lunch hour to make a comment or announcement) because she liked the attention, quickly adding, I don t know anyone who doesn t [like attention]. After a few moments of silence she finally addressed my question and said, They re all taller. Her two current girlfriends were the same friends she had in grade three and her bestest friend, Diana, had moved to another province. I do not remember Molly being particularly close to this bestest friend last year and when I asked if they would be pen pals she answered that she should write but did not have her address.

There were only two references made to family during our two conversations. The first was when she told me her father bought her a knitting set — I remembered she had indicated an interest in this activity during the getting to know you activity back in September of grade three. I was surprised her curiosity had not waned. Her 2005 New Year s resolution had been to learn to knit but as with the guitar, no lessons were forthcoming. In both these activities she learned what she could from books and friends.

The second reference to family arose when we talked about the kinds of things she wrote in her journal. In grades one and two Molly had written about and drawn her two families when asked to, always being careful to label each family. In grade three she said she did not like to talk about personal matters and this included her family. This year, in grade four, she reiterated her dislike of any activity that required her to talk or write about her family. Her reluctance became more comprehensible when she stated that her father and stepmother had separated:

> I don t really like doing that [writing about family]. I don t really want people to know. It kinda bugs me even when I talk about it. I like to talk but I don t usually like to talk about that cause well, cause nobody understands, and it s all so complicated and I barely understand myself but I still understand it. And then it s really frustrating and I don t like writing about it and then I especially don t like drawing pictures of my family cause I can t draw my family together I don t think I know anyone whose . well, I know a couple of people whose parents are divorced but I don t know anyone who went with a step mom and left her again. I think I m the only one who happened with that at school. I don t know.

As was often the case when Molly discussed uncomfortable issues, she changed the topic quickly and moved on, letting me know the discussion was over. In reviewing the transcripts of our last two meetings, I often noticed hesitancy in her answers and an almost apologetic overtone when she talked about herself. For instance, in response to the *TAMS* statement Sometimes I feel no one in the school likes me , these are the comments Molly shared:

- I think I am a bit polite. I think I am.
- I m pretty good at reading.
- My parents made me say all the things I m good at because I m usually very negative.
- I m smart. Everyone says I m smart but I don t know why. I just like to read. But reading usually makes people smart. But sometimes when you read things in books it s not always true.
- I think I kinda am smart but I don t know why everyone thinks I m smart cause there are a lot of things I really don t know.
- I don t think I know more than others my age because I ve never gotten all VG s before.
- I m way too hyper. [Repeated numerous times during the sessions]
- I talk loud and fast. I m the one who talks the most actually.
- I don t have the ability to write quick. [Copying notes from the board]
- I NEVER try to change people s opinions.
- I like telling people [as opposed to writing or drawing] what I ve heard or seen because I m an expressive, oral person. I like talkety, talkety, talkety all the time.
- I have an ability. It s really weird. I can be drawing but I can still listen.

Molly seemed to be more critical of herself and her abilities than in the past. I sensed there was a part of her she was attempting not to show the world or at the very least attempting to downplay. It seemed a bit early to get caught up in the symbols and rituals of adolescence: clothes, music, heroes, and beauty queens. However, her desire to be an actress and go to Hollywood in a Ford Mustang were characteristic young teenage girl dreams but wanting and naming a particular car were typical male adolescent symbols and aspirations. Molly s embrace of these symbols (actress and car) could be the beginning of an erosion of her self-confidence and an attempt at fighting the label gifted . In order to fit in the popular adolescent groups, it was extremely important not to be different, not to stand out in any way. Perhaps she was realizing there was no room for smart or gifted people in the adolescent world. Although gifted adolescents face all the same developmental hurdles faced by other young people during this period, they have the added problem of having to choose between being accepted into the social group or fulfilling their academic talents (Kerr, 1997; Robinson & Noble, 1987).

The pressure to belong to a group and conform to its customs is no longer a phenomenon relegated to junior and senior high school. It seems to have filtered down to upper elementary grades. Molly and her friends wanted to belong to the adolescent culture, and as she was realizing, her acceptance into this world depended upon her knowledge of the symbols and her performance of the rituals (Kerr, 1997). Also, because the adolescent culture is a quickly closed one, if she does not join when she has a chance, she could face continuing social rejection (Kerr, 1997).

Another change in attitude was shown in her answer to the *TAMS* statement, On lots of school days I would rather stay at home . On previous occasions Molly had always vehemently stated no, she would rather be at school. This year she said, Sometimes. It usually happens during math. I m like I wish I was home right now sitting on my bed watching my wide screen TV. Sitting with an egg Mcmuffin, drinking some hot chocolate with hazelnut and vanilla in it. One time I almost fell asleep during math! I started yawning like mad and then I got soooooo tired.

The change in Molly s demeanor, interests and self-perception could also be tied to the early onset of puberty and the abrupt change in society s attitudes toward girls. Kerr (1997) stated, gifted girls seem to undergo great change, a restructuring of personality that is far more extreme than the change occurring in average girls (p. 124). An interest in career is replaced by an intense need for love and belonging; an interest in a particular area of reading is replaced by a newfound love of music, girlfriends, boys, and sleepovers. In order to be indistinguishable from the rest of the crowd, gifted girls may debase their vocabulary, squelch their flow of ideas, and refrain from participating in class discussions (Kerr, 1997). If Molly is successful in becoming a part of the popular crowd and participates energetically in the rituals of adolescence, her friends may ignore her academic standing and her giftedness. If she does not become a part of the popular crowd she may have to tone down her academic pursuits so as not to jeopardize her social standing (Kerr, 1997). The change in personality seemed to have started earlier than usual in Molly as I continued to note changes in preferences and attitudes while we talked about reading and writing.

As Molly completed the *Elementary Reading Survey* (January 13, 2005), I learned that she continued to enjoy reading although her preference was now hardcover fantasy and mystery books. She considered herself a hard cover person not a paperback person cause I put a stone on my paperback to keep the thing from folding. Cause it always folds and it got really dog-eared and it s really weird. Although Molly liked to read she did not engage in the activity as often as in the past, preferring instead to play on the computer, play a card game (UNO or solitaire), or watch television. She sounded almost apologetic that she often preferred these activities to reading. During silent reading time in the classroom Molly said she liked to read *Chicken Soup for the Pre-Teen Soul* because it was the only big one in the room. To remedy the problem she often brought books from home to read. Her favorite author was J.K. Rowling because *Harry Potter* is so awesome and her second favorite was still Cornelia Funk (*The Princess Knight, Dragon Rider)* because she does a mean book . According to Molly both authors had very good ideas and used a lot of details in their stories. They wrote long narratives and their fantasy tales were so well made. And nothing s jumbled up. I get most of the things except sometimes they use very long words.

While completing the *Denver Writing Survey* (January 14, 2005), Molly described the purpose of writing in greater detail than on any other occasion. In her words,

> Writing is doing little scribbles on paper. Cause some people understand writing. Most of us, when we re around six years old or

> seven but when we re younger, we usually see it as just scribbles. And it s a way of words and words are a way of understanding stuff. And writing is putting words on a piece of parchment cause you can t take words from your mouth and stick them on a piece of paper.

Molly now loved writing poetry and little books, which was a change from last year when she did not like writing at all and seemed to see no use for it. This year however, there was a new purpose for her writing — Molly shared that when something bad happened [at school with her friends] she would write it down rather than confront her friends with the issue because she did not want them getting mad at her. Most times she would work things out with her friends but it seemed important she write down her initial reactions and emotions — perhaps as a way of clarifying the incident in her mind, a way of putting it out there in order to better deal with it. Her mother, Jessica, continued to be concerned about how her writing looked and according to Molly, got mad when it was messy.

The changes I observed in Molly over the course of grade three and four were not limited to her reading and writing attitudes and abilities but to how she felt about herself and the world around her. In grade three Molly still loved school, loved learning and continued to read voraciously, especially non-fiction books and books about cats. She believed working hard had its rewards but still did not like writing. Molly now preferred watching reality television shows, was sometimes ignored by friends and talked more about relationships than school. She wanted to be an actress or fashion designer and there were numerous occasions where she tried to say what she knew or what she felt — only to be silenced by the adults around her.

Although there seemed to be a marked difference in her attitude towards school and learning based on her comments during our meeting, the two reading tests administered in January of grade four showed that Molly continued to surpass her peers in reading and comprehension by at least two rankings above grade level. On both the listening comprehension test and the oral reading test, Molly scored at instructional level on junior high school leveled passages. Her perception that I m finally at the same level as everyone else , that was uttered at the beginning of grade four did not coincide with the test results I gathered mid-year.

In grade four her passion for reading was tempered with the acquisition of a television set with DVD player in her bedroom and new computer games, which she loved to play. She liked reading fantasy books, still wanted to become an actress, although this was now coupled with becoming an author, and this year she enjoyed writing because it served a purpose for her. Molly began to question the status quo, was often ambivalent about what she knew and there was often an apologetic overtone when she spoke about herself. She seemed to be losing self-confidence losing her voice.

Chapter Seven

It is an unfortunate reality that school and learning are not synonyms — or, at least, related — in the minds of some gifted children (Delisle, 1992, p. 39).

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

It has been four years since Molly bounced into my classroom and into my life. Her openness, curiosity and joie de vivre ignited an excitement and fascination in me around the many facets of giftedness which in turn set in motion the learning journey which Molly, her parents, the school, and I have been on since 2001. Although the reasons for embarking on this journey and the journey itself were different for each of us, Molly was the thread that bound us together. As I reflect on the reasons for this case study — to observe Molly s reading over time and note any internal or external factors that may have affected it and to better understand giftedness - I am closer to understanding the unfolding complexity of what seemed a relatively simple wonder. Insights gathered in this case study were found in the four places that were related to Molly s reading habits — her two home environments, school and her time spent with me.

Although Molly belongs to the group labeled academically gifted, her life story is unique in part because of the complex and distinctive forces and circumstances that act on and surround her, such as her family, school life, and her peers. These influences or life circles fold into one another and are essential to her growth and development (Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2000).

One way of understanding her journey is to see it as particular points on a continuum between success and failure in the development of her reading potential. Over the last four years as a gifted student, Molly maintained her advantage in French and English reading in relation to her peers. This chapter will examine the influences Molly s homes, school and time with me had on her reading development and will conclude with suggestions for addressing some of the needs of gifted girls and suggestions for further research. Before sharing what I learned from our journey, however, the constructs of giftedness, and success and failure in relation to giftedness require some discussion.

Revisiting Giftedness

When I began this study my understanding of giftedness was limited to the belief that gifted children were those that had a high IQ, as measured by an intelligence scale, and were academically ahead of their peers in a subject area — not unlike the view that Jessica and Bill, Molly s parents, held. Like the majority of people, I thought gifted children represent[ed] a disembodied stereotype of intellectual, behavioral, and social perfection; prodigies who, immune to the problems faced by others, seem[ed] destined for greatness, achievement, and good fortune (Sanders, 1998, p. 199). I also believed that if a person was gifted and did not use their talent, they would lose it - a view not shared by Molly s parents.

The concept of giftedness has varied in accordance with changes in individuals knowledge and in individuals social and political lives. Consequently, there are many definitions of giftedness and the proponents of these various definitions have specific philosophies about who the gifted are or should be. One group, those who study people by looking back over an individual s life (post ex facto), suggest giftedness emerges over time and designate persons to be gifted when they have made an outstanding contribution to society (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Proponents of the IQ type definitions (Gagne, 1998; Silverman, 1993) and the achievement type definitions (Friedman & Shore, 2000; Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994) stress intelligence and academic aptitude, and students are trained for future significant contributions in specific areas of strength. Those who espouse these types of definitions see the gifted as being different in achievement. Other groups see gifted students as being different in kind , that is, they are different in the way they see the world and the way they function in it (Clark, 1997; Kerr, 1994; Smutny, 2003). Some of the special characteristics or traits attributed to the gifted such as innovation, curiosity, and initiation result in their having a different worldview and, therefore, different experiences. One of the more recent views of giftedness is that it is a psychological and socially contextualized construct. Like all constructs, it does not exist as a directly measurable quality or behavior; rather, giftedness is identifiable because certain qualities describe the construct (Coleman & Cross, 2001, p. 72).

Many parents, educators and researchers have formulated conceptions of giftedness based upon the values and knowledge that they hold. Molly s parents seemed to believe that Molly was on the same path as other non-gifted children only she wass further ahead in terms of academic and verbal ability and that it would only be a matter of time until the other, non-gifted, students caught up with her. Seeing Molly s giftedness in this fashion, as a static intellectual condition, seemed to preclude the idea of developing the potential of the gifted child. In this view, you either have it (giftedness) or you do not — like a birthmark, only an internal one. You can accept you have it (or not) but either way, there is not much you can do about it — it being something apart from the person, not of the person.

This static view ignores the fluid, dynamic, and innate nature of intelligence and therefore giftedness, for in this case the two are inextricably intertwined. In this second view of giftedness, espoused by writers such as Kerr (1997), Silverman (1997) and Winner (1996), the gifted child is constantly being changed by and changing the environment. There is something innately different about a gifted child in this view, whether that can be explained in terms of intelligence, brain functioning, physiological events, or a combination thereof, a gifted child remains distinctly different from an intellectually average child. The way gifted children see and interact with their environment is different from the intellectually average child. The environmental forces can impact them in a positive or a negative fashion, like the intellectually average child, but this impact is heightened in gifted children due to their unique traits, such as their keen sensitivity.

The third conception of giftedness suggests that everyone has the potential to become gifted if external circumstances are favorable (Friedman & Shore, 2000). I do not believe that giftedness is a potential that can be developed through external factors nor do I believe that everyone has this potential . Giftedness can certainly be found in all groups of humans. But I do not think everyone is gifted. As Coleman and Cross (2001) explain: Everyone has abilities and worth, and the potential for making a contribution to his or her self-development and to the development of society based on the individual s abilities and environmental conditions. However, while all contributions may be valuable, not all have equal value (p. 21).

Revisiting Achievement of Gifted Girls

In a recent book on the underserved populations of gifted children, the title of a chapter written by Spomenka Calic-Newman (2003), Gifted Girls: Underachieving Politely, Blending Perfectly, Disappearing Quietly, Succeeding Differently , encapsulated eloquently and succinctly, for me, the status of gifted girls today. The knowledge gained from the readings I have done in the area of gifted girls over the last few years and the knowledge gained in my encounters with Molly, fit very well into the descriptive phrases in Calic-Newman s title. I have taken these phrases and shown how Molly s words and expressions, in her first few years of school, lend truth to the statements:

Underachieving politely

> I m not that good at division.
>
> I don t think I know more than others my age because I ve never gotten all VG s before.
>
> I think I m a bit polite. I think I am.

Blending perfectly

I like Emily because she s gross like me.

I have weaknesses and I have strengths.

I NEVER try to change people s opinions.

Disappearing quietly

Sometimes I don t get a chance to answer and then someone else steals my ideas.

I played a brain game on the computer.

I can t let out my talent to singing.

Succeeding differently

Emotions control the world.

Learning is like daydreaming for me.

I like telling people what I ve heard or seen because I m an expressive, oral person.

Too bad I can t say some sort of brain power to you.

Kids have the power of learning.

It was discouraging to note that Molly s thoughts and behaviors already reflected the tensions normally facing gifted adolescent girls and it was equally discouraging to note her succumbing to the cultural expectations of the average in Western society.

Unfortunately, gifted girls receive mixed messages wherever they go — at school, at home, in the community, and from their peers. At school some teachers give the message that it is okay to be gifted *but* do not raise your hand too often and do not disrupt the class if you are bored. At home, some parents give the message that it is okay to be different *but* try to fit in with the rest of the family and do not brag. In the community, gifted children often receive the message that it is okay to voice concerns over social justice issues *but* do not expect to be heard; and often the peers of gifted students send the message that it is okay to be smart *but* do not let it show. Time and again during our conversations I heard evidence of Molly s internal struggles, like those mentioned above. These struggles, according to Brown and Gilligan (1992), arise as gifted girls ...strong feelings come up against a relational impasse that shuts out their experience or shuts down their loud voices, a wall of shoulds in which approval is associated with their silence, love with selflessness, relationship with lack of conflict (p.97). A nineteen-year-old female poignantly describes the confusion about appropriate behavior and the mixed messages received:

> Caught in the double-bind of being labeled gifted, being told I can do anything, being treasured as a bright young person, and at the same time being told not to compete, not to try to run with the guys , not to show off, to be a lady , I spent many years and much invaluable energy in the psychic bind of the gifted girl. Even now.... in college....I still fight the same old battles of outside expectations, awkward roles, and self-sabotage (L. Brush, quoted in Reis, 1987, p. 73).

Molly is beginning to find herself in this psychic bind and I wonder if, at nineteen, she will feel the same way as this young female. Attempting to reconcile the myriad of mixed messages that constantly bombard the gifted girl/woman is one of the most difficult tasks facing them throughout their lives. The way gifted girls/women reconcile these mixed messages relates directly to whether or not they will be viewed as successful.

Revisiting Success and Failure in Relation to Giftedness

In Western society success is directly tied to the amount of money one earns and the position one holds in society — you are deemed to be successful if you earn a high salary and/or if you have an important and acceptable career. Typically, gifted women are seen as successful if they can compete favorably with men - the professional male s achievements are the standards by which gifted women are measured and measure themselves (Silverman, 1996). In elementary school, gifted girls are thought to be successful if they maintain high marks, follow school and social rules, and are popular with their peers. While being asked to comply in school they also receive the message that they can be anything they desire and that their fulfillment will come from their professions and their independence (Calic-Newman, 2003). In the end, these gifted girls sometimes try to become superwomen balancing career, home and family.

Despite the research on careers for gifted girls and the realization of the potential of gifted girls and eminent women, it seems that gifted females are still left with two choices in life — they may have a career and suffer from guilt, exhaustion and fulfillment or they may choose to stay home and suffer from guilt, exhaustion and nonfulfillment (Calic-Newman, 2003). Either choice is limiting. However, potential can be fulfilled in many ways and for women to be able to choose how they will fulfill their potential and to be able to avoid personal conflict while doing so is of crucial importance to them (Calic-Newman, 2003; Gilligan, 1982; Reis, 1987). The ethic of caring, described by Gilligan (1982) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), should lead us to a different view of female giftedness and new definitions of success - definitions that move beyond grade point averages, occupational status and income - to the fulfillment of one s dreams as a defining criterion of women s success (Kerr, 1997). In this study Molly was seen as a successful student by her parents and teachers and considered herself a success in relation to the social and academic expectations that were placed upon her.

In the context of Molly s life at her mother s and stepfather s (Jessica and Darin) house, success was achieved by knowing one s place, being polite, participating in adult conversations, not bragging, and doing well in school. At her father s and stepmother s house (Bill and Sherry), success was achieved by fitting in and being normal , by not getting a big head , by interacting positively with her half-sisters and participating in craft sessions, and by doing as she was told and not drawing attention to herself. In the context of school, Molly was deemed successful when she got good marks, did her assignments correctly, helped her peers, followed the school rules, was compliant, deferred to the wishes and expectations of adults and important friends, and when she did not draw attention to herself. However, feelings of confusion and frustration in attempting to meet the expectations of others and in attempting to follow her dreams and intuitions, led to Molly s diminished voice and self-confidence in grade four and, perhaps, her first perception of herself as not a success.

Failure in relation to giftedness is seen as the exact opposite of the indices of success and the construct is again tied to the idea of achievement. Socially, a failure is seen as someone who has a poor income, a lacklustre and/or unimportant job and who is socially inept. In the education milieu, failure is closely tied to undeveloped potential or underachievement in a gifted child. Failure of the gifted child to do well in school and of the gifted woman to achieve a certain preconceived measure of success in society can be partly blamed on the debilitating but accepted male oriented view of success. Where in the constructs of success or failure, in relation to gifted girls or women, do their hopes and dreams or their reality come into play? As Molly struggled to be a success in everyone s eyes, she failed to be true to herself.

In the context of Molly s life at her mother s and stepfather s home, failure was experienced by not meeting Jessica s and Darin s social and academic expectations. Although neither parent would necessarily look upon an unmet expectation as a failure, Molly would likely feel their disappointment and she would feel herself a failure. At her father s and stepmother s home, Molly experienced failure if she considered herself special or different from her siblings, if she insisted on differential treatment to meet her needs or desires or if she bragged about her accomplishments. In the context of school, Molly was seen as a failure if she received poor grades, did an assignment poorly, misbehaved, or was otherwise uncooperative.

Again, the idea of failure or underachievement in relation to gifted girls/women needs to be re-examined. If, in a reconceptualization of female giftedness, we were to acknowledge the importance of nonintellective factors such as women s dreams, vocations, and choices, our ideas of failure in relation to female giftedness would also change to better reflect gifted women s lived reality (Calic-Newman, 2003). I had the impression that Molly had not experienced failure before entering school — she felt invincible.

When I first met Molly in grade one, she was reading at a grade four level, loved school and learning, read mostly informational texts, traveled weekly between her mother s and father s homes and was open, enthusiastic, curious, and self-confident. The influences of her two homes were important in her perception of herself as a reader and in her development as a gifted female reader. Each home offered Molly different reading and reading-related experiences but I was surprised to find that each had very different views of giftedness and success and failure in relation to giftedness as well as what should be done for Molly.

Molly at Her Mother s and Stepfather s Home

At her mother s, Molly was in an environment of adults who loved to read, play video and computer games and spend quiet times at home. There were hundreds of books, as well as numerous computer and video games. Her mother was an avid reader, speed reading through many of the novels she possessed. Jessica s love of reading was evident as she kept all her books, even some of the ones she received as a child and passed these to Molly. In this environment Molly s literacy experiences included a personal library of books she had read several times, adult and child video and computer games, television and women s magazines. Since Jessica worked out of the home during this time, and Darin s work required the use of a computer, Molly had access to computers at home but the use of the Internet was strictly monitored and rarely permitted. She often watched her mother and stepfather play their favorite video games and was permitted to play some of the more educational ones on occasion. The same was true for the videos they rented.

Although Molly watched many of the typical children s videos, she was sometimes permitted to watch more adolescent and adult type videos, as long as there was no violence or inappropriate subject matter involved. I do not remember hearing of schoolmates coming over to play or coming for a sleepover and there was no mention of any extra curricular activities such as dance, music or art lessons, on evenings or weekends. So it was perhaps not surprising that Molly became increasingly interested in playing video and computer games at home, especially over the course of grades three and four. The games required concentration, fast thinking, prediction, strategic planning, and speed. Some of the games had a story line while others were a quest or an adventure, replete with obstacles and problems that the player tried to solve. Molly sought challenges in all her environments and, at her mother s home, the computer and video games provided not only stimulation for her but a way to be successful too.

There was an effort by Jessica and Darin to protect Molly s childhood innocence even though she was surrounded by adults and adult activities, adult conversation and relationships in their home. Jessica and Darin, as well as their friends, always spoke to Molly as an adult and included her in many of their conversations. This contributed to her sophisticated vocabulary and knowledge base and the interactions were also a way for her to feel successful. Her knowledge of facts impressed both children and adults. Molly liked attention, control and liked to impress others and so her continued reading of non-fiction books satisfied her love of learning and gave her a sense of self-worth, importance and control.

Travel had always interested Molly, perhaps because of her mother s trip to India, which she was so fond of describing, or perhaps because of the books (like Harry Potter) she read and television programs (like the Wild Thornberrys) she watched, in which the characters traveled around the world. Her trip to Quebec in the summer of 2002 was very beneficial to her in a number of ways. She was able to use the French she learned in school and she was able to understand what was said to her. Molly knew her mother was proud of this fact and she also felt proud of her accomplishment in this area — this was another example of Molly feeling successful. Her trip to Quebec also gave her more life experiences that she was able to draw upon during her reading. Given the high economic status of the families in Molly s school, where a large number of children enjoyed family trips to various locations throughout the world, going to Quebec gave her the added opportunity to share travel experiences and delights with her peers fostering an increased sense of belonging among the more popular group of students. Most of the travelling Molly did however, was done vicariously through some of her favorite television programs.

There has been a great deal of controversy over the amount and type of television programs children watch today. This might be particularly worrisome for parents of gifted children since they watch between 3.5 and 4 hours of television daily — typically two to three hours more per day when compared to other children (Abelman, 1995). However, the impact of television viewing is different for each child and the reasons are aptly described by Abelman (1995):

> Where children come from geographically, how they are reared, the personality they possess, the friends they have, their unique abilities and disabilities, their self-perception, their sense of humor, and the many, many intangibles that comprise being a child as well as an individual all impact on what aspects of television are attractive, what is interesting, and what children take from their overall televiewing experience. All this has an impact on whether or not kids duplicate behavior depicted on the screen or whether they find those behaviors particularly relevant to their own lives (p.43-44).

Television is seen by many as an equal opportunity entertainer whose greatest power lay in its role as the central storyteller for our culture (Abelman, 1995). We receive a wealth of social and cultural information from television without ever needing to be able to read or write. Gifted children not only see the world around them differently but, according to Abelman (1995), they watch television differently too:

> The distinction between view and watch is that the former refers to the passive act of sitting in front of the television set and being stimulated and titillated. The latter refers to actual thoughtful processing and comprehension of program content. Young gifted kids televiewing is, for the most part, a cognitively active activity (p. 49).

Also, the reasons gifted children watch television are likely because they are naturally attracted to an accessible and interesting source of information; they are searching for positive and challenging experiences; and they focus on specific programs rather than surf the stations (Abelman, 1995).

Molly s television viewing focused almost exclusively on the nature programs found on the Discovery Channel, on historical events such those found on the History Channel or on social justice issues in cartoons like The Wild Thornberry s - at least in the first three years of the study. This focus reflected the types of books she read and, since she had read all the books at her mother s at least once, it is not surprising she chose to find similar challenging information through other means. Abelman (1995), describes why television viewing is a positive experience for most gifted children:

> Viewing gives gifted kids an opportunity to observe and familiarize themselves with advanced or abstract concepts and relationships that are normally learned at a later age through other media. Similarly, viewing allows them to practice their perceptual abilities, developing linguistic and critical thinking skills, and puts their knowledge of the real world to the test if the programming is found to be sufficiently challenging (p. 52).

I could see how the above description could fit Molly s viewing habits during the first three years of this study but when she acquired a television in her room and when the types of programs she enjoyed watching changed from children s, nature and historical programs to reality shows and self-help programs, it was a little harder to imagine how the above description fit. However, knowing that gifted children see the world differently, knowing that they watch television, not having had the forethought to ask her what she thought about her newest favorite programs, and knowing that she displayed adolescent type behaviors even in grade three, it would be unjust and narrow-minded to say Molly got nothing from these programs. Because I did not ask, I do not know what impact they had on her. The change in her television viewing habits seemed to coincide with a change in reading habits (non-fiction to fiction and women s magazines) and in her school focus (from academics to relationships). Age could also have been a factor in this change. I believe that the gender roles in the newest programs she enjoyed watching were more prevalent and damaging than in the nature and historical types she enjoyed previously. In a study done by the National Commission on Working Women that examined more than 200 episodes of daytime and prime time television programs specifically containing adolescent female characters, they found that:

- Teenage girls looks are portrayed as being more important than their brains;
- Intelligent girls are sometimes depicted as social misfits, especially if they place brains over looks;

- Intelligent girls are typically found attractive only by intelligent boys, who are themselves depicted as social misfits; and
- Teenage girls in general are frequently portrayed as incapable of having intelligent conversations about academic interests or career goals (Abelman, 1995, p. 65).

The gender roles Molly witnessed in the reality and other prime time television shows, reflected the types of behaviors and expectations she was beginning to experience at school, in women s magazines and, to a lesser extent, in her homes. When the same message — be normal - is played repeatedly by the environmental forces surrounding gifted girls, it is no wonder they are underachieving politely, blending perfectly and disappearing quietly (Calic-Newman, 2003).

Jessica and Darin acknowledged Molly s giftedness, were proud of it and, although they were not sure if anything special needed to be done for Molly, they often bought her books of interest, patiently answered her many questions and offered praise, encouragement and guidance in different areas of her life. When Jessica recognized Molly had a talent for writing musical lyrics they bought her a guitar. Although Jessica and Darin were impressed with her songs and offered praise and encouragement there was no follow through with lessons and the book that came with the purchase of the guitar was her only aid. They expected the school to meet Molly s academic needs. Jessica s and Darin s emphasis on not bragging, on being polite and learning one s place (Kerr, 1994) was taken very seriously by Molly. She was very aware of how her reactions interplayed with the reactions of others and avoided conflict whenever possible. Molly wanted to please the people who were important to her and, by playing according to their rules she could do so and feel successful. Sometimes playing by the rules meant giving up your voice as was demonstrated in the exchange Molly had with her mother during our last interview together when Molly was admonished for bragging while trying to explain that her cold made it difficult for her to sing. Gifted girls may not recognize until much later, after they have wrestled with the competing forces of their wishes and the expectations of others, that they gave up much by playing according to the rules of others. Molly s need to please, coupled with the strains of early adolescent behaviors and desires resulted in a gradual loss of voice and self-confidence in grades three and four. Her focus went from academic needs and desires to social expectations.

Molly at Her Father s and Stepmother s Home (Bill and Sherry)

At her father s, Molly was in an environment where the focus was on children. There were numerous toys and craft materials around to distract her two younger siblings, both sisters. Children s books and Disney videos lined shelves in the family room, the only room with a television. Molly had her own bedroom at her father s and stepmother s home, to which she often retreated when she had had enough of the noise and demands of her sisters.

Most of Molly s television viewing was based on what was appropriate for the two younger siblings — Disney movies, the Family channel programs and cartoons such as the Bernstein Bears, Pokemon, the Wild Thornberry s and others. There was no computer in this household or any video games. Instead, Sherry and the three girls often engaged in craft or drawing sessions, baked together or did some sewing (Molly had her own small children s sewing machine which broke down after the first few uses). Molly found ways to challenge herself in this environment such as the time she made a butterfly from a kit she received as a gift and then proceeded to start a journal describing the butterfly s adventures. Molly read the Readers Digest magazines that Bill and Sherry subscribed to and the *Why?* (Scholastic, 1997) series of books her father had ordered for her. She also regularly read to her sisters. At this home too however, Molly quickly ran out of reading material and, although they brought her to the public library more often than Jessica and Darin, they also could not keep up with her reading appetite.

At her father s, Molly was surrounded by younger siblings, children s activities, children s movies, books, children s conversations and sibling relationships. Although neither Bill nor Sherry spoke to the children using baby talk, the opportunity for conversations with an adult was limited to naptimes when Molly could speak to Sherry or late evenings if she wanted to speak to her father. As at Jessica s and Darin s home, there was no mention of school friends visiting or having sleepovers nor was there any mention of extra-curricular activities. It was probably difficult, however, to organize any extra-curricular activities when Molly shuffled weekly between two households.

Bill and Sherry preferred not to think about Molly s giftedness. They both had reservations about the notion of giftedness and were not altogether sure about the validity or reliability of the tests Molly was given in kindergarten. Bill and Sherry saw each of the three girls as being special in their own way and preferred not to dwell on Molly s intellectual capabilities for fear of not treating the children equally. Because Bill and Sherry believed Molly was receiving a lot of support for her giftedness at Jessica s and Darin s, they were determined she experience normality at their house and agreed to basically ignore Molly s giftedness. To be successful in this house, Molly needed to fit in and not draw attention to herself, get along with her half sisters and do well in school.

Molly had always wanted a bird as a pet but neither household was interested in indulging her desire. Bill and Sherry had a cat and Molly was able to play with and sometimes take care of it although she acknowledged it was not quite the same thing as having your own pet to take care of. She remedied this situation at Jessica s and Darin s by going online to the Neopets website and designing, naming and taking care of her own cyber pets. Molly felt that if she could show she was responsible enough to take care of a pet, her wish to have one might come true. To my knowledge this did not come about but her desire to knit had results.

Bill acknowledged Molly s desire to learn to knit by buying her a knitting kit, complete with needles, wool and an instruction booklet. However, there was no one in the household that knew how to knit and so Molly was again left to figure it out on her own with the help of the accompanying instruction booklet. Molly s increased interest in mathematics in grades two and three was supported by both Bill and Sherry, although Sherry was the math whiz according to Bill. Bill taught Molly how to make change and Sherry taught her about negative numbers and both helped with any problems she experienced. It was gratifying to note that Molly continued to enjoy and do well in math in grade four, contrary to what has been noted in the literature with respect to gifted girls (Freeman, 2001; Hollinger, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1995). Most gifted girls, even if they are gifted in mathematics, do not participate in class nor do they achieve to their potential in this subject, and many tend to avoid the advanced mathematics courses in high school and college altogether.

Bill engaged in several distinct and significantly different practices than fathers of the nongifted, as is reported in the literature on this subject (Gelbrich, 1998). He read for long periods and frequently to Molly when she was young and taught her specific reading strategies during the readings. Bill consciously encouraged her oral language development by frequently asking questions concerning the stories read, by asking her to focus on the pictures and talk about what she saw, and by asking her to retell the stories in her own words. Like Jessica, he also encouraged Molly to act independently from an early age. The emphasis Bill placed on these practices supports the findings regarding the father s role in developing cognition in their gifted children (Gelbrich, 1998).

There is a subtle fear in being parents of a gifted child that both Jessica and Bill alluded to in our interviews. They recognized that the world is sympathetic to students who have learning or physical disabilities and their families but parents of nongifted children are often unwilling to acknowledge or talk about the problems of the gifted whom they see as having it all . Unless parents of gifted children get together to support one another, they remain silent for fear of being seen as bragging or of being ridiculed. Neither of Molly s parents sought support from other parents of gifted children, nor did they seek support from the various organizations within the area that catered to gifted children of all ages, despite receiving pamphlets and encouragement from school personnel.

Molly and School

School was one of the forces in Molly s environment that had the power to either shape or deter her development (Piirto, 1999). At school, Molly was in an environment where the focus was on fun and learning for the average child. Molly was well liked in school although often there were times when she preferred working or playing alone rather than with a group. She especially enjoyed her self-titled freestyle recesses which is where she played by herself and could do whatever I want, whenever I want, wherever I want (FN, June 2004). At school, as well as at her father s home, she would find time to be alone which is consistent with the characteristics of gifted children reported in the literature (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Smutny, 1998; Winner, 1996)

Although this study focused on Molly s reading development in both languages, the reading aspect turned out to be less important than the socio-emotional one. What started as a voracious hunger for reading in kindergarten and grade one became more of a weekend pastime by grade four. Despite the change in Molly s reading habits, the *Gates McGinitie* reading tests, administered by the homeroom teachers, showed she consistently scored at a grade equivalent that was three grades ahead of the grade she was in. At the end of grade one she was reading material equivalent to what a third grade student read, in grade two she was reading the equivalent of grade five material and by the end of grade three the test showed her reading the equivalent of grade six.

The same growth pattern was exhibited in the standardized reading tests (*Qualitative Reading Inventory II, 1995; The Stieglitz Informal Reading Inventory, 1992)* I administered to her. Molly consistently scored at an instructional level at least two levels ahead of her grade placement in each of the tests over the three years. This growth occurred in spite of the fact that little, if any, differentiated reading instruction was given to her during these years. Molly s test results are consistent with what is reported in the literature, in that gifted children tend to achieve about 44% above their chronological age and tend to have mastered the curriculum to a point two to four grades beyond the one in which they are enrolled (Coleman & Cross, 2001). The results of Molly s *Thinking About My School Survey (TAMS)* and *Reading Surveys* (McKenna & Kear, 1990; Davis & Rhodes, 1991) supported the findings that the attitude and self-confidence of some gifted girls diminish as they go through school (Freeman, 2001; Rimm, 1986; Smutny, 1998; Winner, 1996).

Although Molly continued to excel and retain her academic advantage in reading over her non-gifted peers, despite receiving only limited challenging schoolwork, her attitude towards learning and her self-confidence declined. Given gifted girls predisposition to please others and follow the rules, it seems schools take advantage of this trait to bring them into the fold — and by doing so, inadvertently perhaps, school them for underachievement. One of the interesting observations of this study was the differences that existed between teachers in their degree of interest in, knowledge of, and ability to work with, gifted students. Theoretically, in today s climate of inclusive policies and practices, teachers should be well informed in the broad range of students abilities and should be alert to the individual differences demonstrated by the gifted child. Unfortunately, their record for doing so is less than spectacular (Hauck & Freeehill, 1972; Kerr, 1997; Whitmore, 1980; Winner, 1996). More often than not, the gifted child in the regular classroom is never asked to perform to his or her potential, presented instead with mundane and unchallenging tasks. It seems little has changed since 1931, when Leta Hollingsworth remarked that gifted children wasted much of their time in school:

> Where the gifted child drifts in the school unrecognized, held to the lockstep which is determined by the capacities of the average, he has little to do. He receives daily practice in habits of idleness and day-dreaming. His abilities are never genuinely challenged, and the situation is contrived to build in him expectations of an effortless existence. (Hollingsworth, 1931, quoted in Winner, 1996, p. 246).

Although nowadays educators are becoming much better at recognizing gifted students in their classrooms, challenging them remains sporadic if it happens at all and therefore the above quotation, in my mind, is still true.

In the early 1960 s, an elementary school district in California began an experimental program that saw highly gifted underachieving primary grade students placed in a class for Underachieving Gifted (UAG). The Underachieving

Gifted Program was intended to create achievement motivation through the improvement of self-perceptions and the provision of more appropriate curriculum and instruction. The design was supposed to eliminate the seven characteristics of American schools identified in 1961 as basic school hazards to the mental health of all children. The seven characteristics were identified as:

> (a) compartmentalization of learning, unrelated to life situations; (b) a subject matter approach to education; (c) grading and its unreliability, subjectivity, and damage to the ego; (d) the threat of failure and nonpromotion; (e) meaningless work at school and home; (f) teacher authoritarianism; and (g) lack of freedom and self direction (Whitmore, 1980, p. 223).

Today, there is little change in terms of education of the gifted and they continue to present challenges for our schools (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Although we are identifying gifted students more easily, the debate continues about the best way to educate them. There remains, however, many stumbling blocks that must be overcome in attempting to reach an agreement on what would be the best way to educate the gifted. Short-sighted inclusionary policies, different philosophies of giftedness, a world view that promotes equality for all, lack of money and resources in the schools, inadequate teacher training, larger class sizes, and a burgeoning curriculum that requires more and more integration of subjects, have all impacted the education of the gifted child in the regular classroom. In Molly s case all of the above factors have impacted her school learning experience.

Teachers are faced with many different kinds of special needs students, including the gifted, in their classrooms every year and in most cases do not receive the proper training or support necessary to educate them. Molly s teachers were no different and for the most part felt that being in an immersion program was challenging enough for them. Even without special training or support, teachers are expected to make sure each child succeeds and reaches or surpasses their potential. There is often a hue and cry if struggling students do not meet acceptable standards and resources and special programs are put in place to make sure the standards are met. The gifted student, however, does not receive the same treatment or visibility perhaps because they already surpass the standards set and can therefore easily be ignored. In this study of Molly, the school district has an inclusionary policy for children identified as gifted but there is no consultant for gifted education and few resources for this group. Equal opportunity for an appropriate education does not seem to apply to this group of students in the inclusive school setting. Nonetheless, the inclusion movement can be a positive force in education if it is used to benefit students and not just to support an abstract principle of narrowly interpreted egalitarianism ..every student has a right to an equal opportunity to receive a quality educational experience; however, that should not be interpreted to be the *same* experience (Clark, 1997, p. 19). Giving the gifted student an appropriate educational experience these days, often means differentiating the curriculum, and taking into account the differing learning styles of the gifted student. There were few attempts to differentiate the curriculum for Molly during the years I observed her.

The learning styles of the student are often incompatible with the instructional style of the teacher (Whitmore, 1980). Gifted children want to learn by complex associative methods rather than by rote drill. They want to use their advanced problem-solving skills and analytical abilities in research projects. Their learning styles also require teachers to generate opportunities for creativitiy, self-expression, questionning, debate, idea play, and critical/evaluative thinking in their assignments (Whitmore, 1980). Many regular classroom teachers find it difficult to differentiate the curriculum, in an attempt to meet the needs of gifted students. The unavailabity and inadequacy of teacher training programs coupled with limited resources for educating the gifted exacerbates this continuing and growing problem (Coleman & Cross, 2001). In Molly s case, both the grade two and three teachers freely admitted they were not comfortable with, nor knowledgeable about the ways to differentiate the curriculum for her.

It is interesting to note that teachers too receive mixed messages. They work in a context that says you should be able to do it all and live in a society that believes gifted children will do okay in school without any extra assistance . District and school policies require that teachers know each child s educational needs at the same time as they create situations in which teachers are told, you will have 35 students in your classroom next year . Teachers are told every student can succeed *but* not every student does. Teachers are expected to meet the educational needs of each student *but* they work in schools where there will not be any money for resources, counselors or teacher aides next year . Teachers are expected to meet each child at their present level of development and proceed from there *but* district and provincial policy require that all students need to meet the acceptable standard on the achievement test . The demands placed upon teachers continue to grow and the expectation they will meet those demands remains.

Each year, as I entered Molly s newest classroom to observe her, I wondered whether the teachers were comfortable with my presence or whether they felt obliged to address Molly s needs because I was present. I never knew how much of what was done for Molly in terms of educational challenges were for her benefit or for mine — or perhaps it was for both. Molly s teachers and the rest of the staff knew I was watching what they were or were not doing with their gifted students. There were times in the staffroom when I would be approached with questions or be asked for assistance with special projects teachers were planning for their gifted students. I taught at this school for ten years and do not remember the teachers engaging in any kind of discussion pertaining to the education of gifted students before I began my research at the school. I wondered if they suddenly felt accountable and I wondered if they continued to plan special projects and seek answers to their queries on gifted education when I was no longer present in the classroom or in the school.

Molly and Me

Jessica and Bill agreed to and encouraged my observations of Molly s school life for four years and they allowed me into their home lives as well. They both had fears about Molly being labeled gifted and what that would mean socially and academically in the school setting. Letting Molly become the focus of my research was, perhaps, a way for them to understand their daughter s giftedness — a way to better understand Molly. Perhaps they imagined we would engage in discussions about the different aspects of giftedness that pertained to Molly. I also wondered if they thought it was a way to have Molly s academic needs met. Who would not want their child to receive extra positive attention, want someone to get to know their child and help them learn? They trusted me as the teacher they first met and the researcher I turned out to be. They trusted me to be sensitive to what I saw, what I heard, how I spoke of it, and how I wrote about it — in the school setting, when I went into their homes and when I was alone with Molly. I was allowed to be a part of her life more fully than would otherwise have been possible. It was both an incredible responsibility and opportunity of which I was constantly aware.

As much as this was the story of Molly s struggles and successes as a female gifted student, it was also, in part, the story of my own struggles as a female teacher who avoids conflicts, a female who cherishes friendships among colleagues, and a female who often felt terribly inadequate as a researcher and teacher, often questioning my interpretation of what I witnessed or heard.

There were times, in grades three and four, when I wondered about the depth of Molly s purported love of reading. On two separate occasions, during interviews with Jessica, I asked if Molly frequented the library, if she had told her about the latest book she was reading or interested in. In both instances Jessica seemed surprised and embarrassed that she did not know what I was referring to. It was obvious Molly had not mentioned these desires to her mother. During the last interview, when Molly was present, I sensed Jessica again felt embarrassed when Molly indicated she wanted to read the sequels to a book she had enjoyed. Surprised, Jessica told her she needed only to ask and they would attempt to obtain them for her. I reflected on these instances and believed that although Molly still loved to read, at some point during the last two years, this love had waned or become uncool and she did not want me to see this. I believe Molly sometimes told me what she thought I wanted to hear. She told me she wanted to visit the library, she told me she wanted to read certain books but did not communicate these desires to her parents. How much did she want these things? Was she afraid to tell me her true feelings on the subject? If she had not kept up the same kind of enthusiasm that characterized the beginning of this study did she think I would lose interest in her? Did she think I would lose interest in spending time with her in and outside the classroom? Was she afraid she would be less special in the eyes of her peers and would she feel less special if she were no longer the focus of my attention? It seemed she played by what she thought were my rules, on the surface, in order to stay in relationship with me (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). What I was hearing from Molly about reading at school was not always the same as what Jessica and Darin were hearing at home.

I wondered what part I played in Molly s reading habits. Did I contribute to her love of reading? Her change in reading preferences and habits? The answer is undoubtedly yes, but I believe my influence was not so much connected to the academic aspect as to the socioemotional one because during our frequent conversations I always allowed a space in the conversation for her own voice (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). I took her out of the classroom regularly, showed concern in appropriate situations, listened and did not criticize. Molly felt special because she knew I was interested in her and how she learned. Being with me offered her a space to share, question and sometimes pursue her interests. With her I was willing to enter into a conversation that bends the rules [and] into a relationship that plays to the imagination (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

I learned to pay more attention to what and how she expressed herself, verbally, with body language, and in written and artistic forms. Her openness and my focus on her as a gifted female student heightened my awareness and concern about the state of affairs concerning gifted education in my school district. However, there were numerous occasions when I had to control the emotional rollercoaster ride I felt at what I witnessed or heard during my observations, in the corridors, in the staffroom, or during the interviews. I tried to temper my discouragement with the positive happenings and influences that existed around Molly and needed to remind myself that those around her were doing all they could for her, the best way they knew how. I remembered too that it took me years to come to an understanding of the complexity of not only the phenomenon of giftedness and the issues surrounding it, including Molly s particular unfolding story, but also the complexity of meeting the needs of this diverse population of students. Unlike my colleagues, I had the advantage of pursuing graduate studies in this area, stepping out of the classroom and into a world of ideas and learning. Stepping outside the classroom and the school also allowed me to appreciate how Molly and I influenced each other during our time together.

Because I allowed Molly to pursue her interests through reading, special projects and a differentiated English curriculum in grade one, and because I took her out of the classroom regularly in grades two and three to work on special projects, I was not allowing her to underachieve politely . By encouraging her to stand up for her beliefs and not be afraid to be different I was not allowing her to blend perfectly . By listening carefully to her stories, questioning her ideas and beliefs, and encouraging her to express herself, I do not believe I allowed her to disappear quietly . In the three years I was with Molly, I believe she succeeded differently because we were in a dynamic shared relationship in which values, attitudes, passions, and traditions are passed from one person to another and internalized (Berger, 1990). I was her mentor and mentorships, according to Berger (1990), are meant to transform lives. Kaufman s (1981) study of presidential scholars showed that having a mentor was an important factor between gifted females who achieved eminence in their field and those who did not. Respondents in Kaufman s (1981) study stated that significant mentors were ones who had offered intellectual stimulation, communicated excitement and joy in the learning process, and understood them and their needs. I believe I provided this for Molly during our times together and I feel grateful that in some small way, I made a difference in her life as she did in mine.

Reflections on the Research Process

Looking back over the times spent in and out of the classroom with Molly, I am aware of how much knowledge I gained because of our encounters and how much was missed. It was difficult, during those first months of observations, to notice the behaviors and learning instances that were applicable to my research questions. I kept noticing other interactions in the classroom which, at first, I did not think were related to what I was suppose to be researching. Compounding the difficulty in keeping my observations focused on the research questions was the complexity in reconciling the roles I represented to the teachers in whose classrooms I observed. I entered their classrooms as a researcher but was also regarded as their colleague, mentor, and friend for I had worked in this school for over a decade. It was difficult to keep perspective as a participant observer when I was asked to help out with instruction and discipline while serving as a confidant during recesses and days I was not in the classroom. I sometimes wondered if the role of researcher would have been easier in a different school and classroom where I was not known.

Colleagues perceptions and actions were also sometimes difficult to deal with. No longer just the teacher among them, I was regarded the specialist in gifted education and the expectation was that I had the answers to all their queries. Sometimes they were looking for simple answers to complex questions and when I attempted to explain the intricacy of the phenomenon of giftedness and the concomitant educational options available I often met with feigned looks of interest and/or interruptions that moved onto different topics of discussion. I felt somewhat alienated and alone in my new roles, in an old environment with old friends and colleagues.

Although year three of gathering my research data was the one where I spent the least amount of time in the classroom, it was also one of the most productive ones because I had a much clearer understanding of where my research data had led me and what was important to note in my interactions with Molly and her parents. I enjoyed spending time with Molly and never tired of her stories. Those same stories were often the catalysts to further questions and wonders I had in the field. It was hard to leave the school and leave Molly in year four of the study but if what Berger (1990) states is true — that mentor relationships never formally end — which I feel is correct, for Molly and I have each made an indelible imprint on one another s lives, then I look forward to connecting with her again at some point down the road. And I know that when we do meet again, we will give each other a big smile and she will eagerly talk and I will eagerly listen to how her life has been unfolding.

As much as the three years teaching and gathering data were busy and stress-filled, the year I took a leave of absence to write this dissertation was the exact opposite. I reveled in the fact I had time and I could focus on one thing — my writing — in a safe and caring space that promoted collegiality, sharing, thought-provoking discussions, and encouragement. Not that the year was filled with idleness, for there is certainly a different kind of stress associated with putting ideas on paper in a coherent and meaningful fashion. However hard the process of writing was at certain points, I felt grateful that there was always someone around who would help me get over the hump , who would not let me linger too long in one place in the writing and who would help me explore the possible roads I could take when I got to an impasse. My colleagues around the table at The Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development were like family — and like family, were there for me every step of the way. I remember sharing at the table one day that I was both excited and sad that my dissertation journey was almost at an end and saw the questioning looks on some of my colleagues faces — why sad? How should I explain it? Except maybe to say that it has been quite a ride and although one has to move forward at least I can do so a changed person with wonderful memories in tow.

Would I do anything differently if I had to do it over again? Certainly, for on a learning journey there are always mistakes or oversights made. In my case, I would have paid more attention to what Molly was not saying during our times together and when she interacted with her peers. I am reminded of what Brown and Gilligan (1992) wrote about interviews , which I believe also holds true for the conversations Molly and I had together — that the interview...is a conversation of a different sort from the conversations we are used to in everyday life: it is both private and public, informal and formal, lived in the present but preserved for the future... [and] has different meanings for the people in it (p. 25). I realize what we hear, see and understand or do not hear, see and understand in any conversation depends on who we are and where we are, at that moment in time. However, looking back, it is difficult not to want to have seen or heard more.

Although I would have also liked a more natural relationship with Molly, I am now not sure that it would have been possible given who she was and was becoming. More detailed field notes would also have been helpful but that is a skill that continues to develop. The research process has pushed me to different academic and personal limits, all of which supported my professional and personal growth.

Suggestions for Further Research

There is a need for more single or multiple case studies on gifted females in elementary schools. Multiple case studies could be conducted at various sites and focus on different issues in the education of gifted females such as: (a) their attitudes towards schooling and learning; (b) explore the discussions of gifted females in homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings in different subject areas especially language arts, mathematics and the sciences; and (c) a survey of the reading and television viewing interests of gifted girls. Understanding some of the scenarios gifted girls function in could lead to a better understanding of what can be done to stop young gifted girls from disappearing early in their school career.

Further research is also needed in the area of mentorship in relation to gifted girls, whether the mentors are family members, school personnel or other significant persons in the gifted girl s life. Longitudinal studies would be most beneficial as they would attempt to find out how much and in what way (if any) the mentors affected the gifted girls decisions and thinking.

Finally, there is a need for further research in the area of teacher attitudes and beliefs towards gifted females. Again, a multiple case study approach could be used to focus on the assessment practices of elementary school teachers with respect to the gifted children in their classrooms. Research is also needed to ascertain the effects of the teachers beliefs and approaches in the education of the gifted students in their classroom. Teachers play a significant role in the gifted students life and it is important to note their understanding of giftedness and what they do for the gifted children in their classrooms. Continuing research on young gifted girls gives us the opportunity to better manage their underachievement and/or disappearance in their formative school years.

It is ironic that because gifted girls blend so easily into the ordinary, they lose what is extraordinary about them (Calic-Newman, 2003). They adjust so successfully, decline so quietly and disappear so gradually that we cannot remember when the underachievement started and we no longer know who were the girls of exceptional promise among us (p.396).

Educators need to understand and embrace the idea that gifted girls and women succeed differently. With a redefinition and new understanding of female giftedness they can then take responsibility for the meaningful education of gifted females, so girls like Molly won t look back at their lives with feelings of regret and missed opportunity and say, I should have but.... or I could have if... or I never had time to... . It is their turn. They require it. They deserve it. It is time.

EPILOGUE

Dear Molly,

I have finished writing our story. It is a beautiful summer afternoon and I am sitting in my backyard enjoying the sunshine, the birds singing and the last splash of colorful flowers in my garden. And I am thinking of you. What fun we had together! I am writing you this letter because I want to tell you how special I found our time together. I want to share with you what you taught me and what my hopes are for your future.

Did you know that I always looked forward to our times together? I loved listening to your stories and I loved it when you shared your ups and downs and your hopes and dreams with me. You made me think with your questions, laugh with some of your stories and sometimes you brought tears to my eyes, although I never let you see *them. It made me very happy to see how much you liked school and learning. As I watched you learn in class, I was learning too – from you! You taught me a lot about what gifted girls could be like during their first few years of school. I learned that gifted girls needed to work with others who were curious about life and wanted to find out more about things. I learned that you needed the freedom and resources to follow your heart's desire but that you also needed someone to guide you and listen when things did not go right. I learned a lot from you, Molly and I want to thank you for helping me become a better teacher.*

When I think of you in junior and senior high school and maybe even university, I am a little scared because I hope so much that you will continue to love learning. That is sometimes a little hard to do as you get older but I hope you do not let anything stand in the way of your dreams. Always believe in yourself, Molly, and do what makes you *happy – no matter what anyone else may try to tell you. My hope is that you continue to "fall in love with ideas" and that you go after those ideas with the same enthusiasm and joy that I saw during our times together.*

It would be nice to stay in touch and talk to each other once in awhile. I would like that. When we do see each other, I know that I will give you a hug and ask you how things are going. It will be like talking to an old friend.

I only wish the best for you Molly, in school, with friends and with anything you try to do in life. May there always be angels helping you on your journey.

With love,

Madame Gauthier

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Appendix A

Sample Interview Questions - Parents

The following is a list of sample questions that will be used throughout the interview.

1. What did you notice that made you wonder if your child might be gifted?
2. How did you feel about it?
3. Did you do anything differently because of your perception that she may be gifted?
4. Have you ever experienced doubts about her giftedness?
5. Was she tested? Can you tell me what that process was like for you and for __________?
6. Did you tell her she was gifted? If so, when and how? If not, why?
7. Do you think people treat her differently because she can read and express herself so well?
8. What does she think about her reading ability? Writing ability?
9. What do you expect from the school and the teachers in relation to your child s giftedness in language arts?
10. What are some of the positive aspects of having a child gifted in reading?
11. What are some of the negative aspects of having a child labeled gifted?
12. What do you see as being important when looking at the social and academic development of your child?
13. What are your expectations for your child? Would they have been different had she not been gifted?
14. What do you do at home to promote her language abilities?
15. What do you continue to notice about your child s language abilities?

Appendix B

Sample Interview Questions — Child

1. What do you like to do at home?
2. Do you think you are different from other children? How?
3. What are you really good at? What are you not so good at?
4. Tell me about something that you are trying to improve.
5. What is your favorite kind of reading? What is your least favorite kind of reading? Why?
6. Do you remember the first book you read? Tell me about the experience.
7. Why do people read?
8. Who read you stories when you were little? What kind of stories?
9. Do you think it is important to have friends at school? At home? Why?
10. What would you like to do when you grow up? Why?
11. What do you like most about school? Least?
12. What is your favorite kind of writing? Least favorite? Why?
13. Do you remember the first thing you wrote? Tell me about the experience.
14. Why do people write?
15. Did someone help you write when you were little? What kind of things did you write?